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Great Waters

Vere Hutchinson

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**GREAT
WATERS**

Vere
Hutchinson

HENRY H. ANDERSON, JR.

Great Waters

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BY

Vere Hutchinson

Author of "Sea Wrack," etc.

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Vere Hutchinson
Author of "Sea Fronts," etc.

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FOR
D. M. B. B.
THROUGH THE YEARS

GREAT WATERS

CHAPTER I

BOOK ONE

They that go down to the sea in ships,
That do business in great waters;
These see the works of the Lord,
And his wonders in the deep.

They mount up to heaven,
They go down again to the depths:
Their soul is melted because of trouble.

Psalms, 107.

GREAT WATERS

CHAPTER I

I

THAT it is considered by most men a proper and natural thing to count their day of birth as the beginning of life, I know well enough. Yet for my part I think differently, taking it only as a mark to start away from until there comes some surer point—some distinct sign or meaning which looms up in your path like a great obelisk and makes you know the past years as empty, meaningless things, and those which face you now of tremendous moment, waiting to see into what shape or mold you may choose to cast them.

So it happened with me. So my beginning came. In one sudden moment, and my whole life was shifted about as a ship with the tide; in one sudden moment, and the twenty-two odd years I had lived were swept aside and so blotted from my memory as to leave me only most frightfully concerned with the full significance of those which most certainly would follow.

Seventeen hundred and fifty—the date is so burnt into my brain there is no forgetting it. Seventeen hundred and fifty, and the month August, and the time the afternoon; the place Bristol, and I, at that

moment, sorting and signing certain papers relating to a newly arrived ship from Jamaica. I was in those days a clerk with Mr. Henry Bride, a merchant-man with much trade in the Indies.

There was something positively insufferable in the heat of the afternoon. In the haze that hung sickly and sullen, like great veils of blue gauze draping the sea and land; in the stale atmosphere which seemed to muffle you round like sodden, heavy blankets and carry with it every possible smell from every quarter of the town. Garbage and filth from the roads, rotten fish and stagnant sea-water from the harbor. Reeking of paint from the ships at anchor, and the men who worked there, while even in the shelter of the warehouse the unwashed, unclean floor and walls seemed to carry their own particular stink and choke you with it. I had discarded my coat long ago, and it is a certain thing my vest would have followed, when a shadow fell across the doorway and with that shadow there came a step, and I was suddenly face to face with the man whom, had I but known, I would have saluted then and there as the controller of my destiny, the maker of my beginning. . . .

We simply stood staring at each other with hardly the quiver of an eyelid between us; and if it is certain he was not one jot disconcerted by my own silent curiosity, for my part the steady scrutiny of his still, cold eyes amused me. He did n't wish to speak, that seemed fairly obvious. He simply wanted to look and keep on looking at me. At my face, at my half-done waistcoat, at my shoes even. Particularly at

my face. So I thought, "Very well, then, I can promise not to interrupt"; and I nearly murmured, "Why not come in from the heat? You could see me better in the darker room."

Yet I did n't. There was something about his face which fascinated and sent me off in a dream of my own. How that face spoke and ate and drunk and slept, and what it knew of life and what it had seen, and what it knew of power, and how hotly or coldly it could wield such a thing. . . . Like a hawk! that was it. Like a hawk waiting and watching and brooding and thinking; head all sunken into hunched shoulders; chin pressed down tightly against his narrow chest. A huge nose, jutting out like the crag of a cliff, the skin drawn tight like yellow parchment over jagged and massive bones to where it sagged away beneath a gaunt and most terrific jaw. And yet there was something undeniably beautiful in the depths of those staring eyes, in the wonderful sweep of that proud forehead. Something that made me stare and stare again, doubly fascinated by their intense quiet and dignity, and then suddenly draw back a little as I realized how violent the contrast was between that splendid strength and the stunning cruelty of his mouth! Between the perfect serenity of those eyes and the almost repulsive thinness of the long upper lip, drawn back tightly against the teeth as if to make room for the lower one, which hung loosely, rather like a pouch, and which, beside that colorless skin, stood out like a livid smear of blood.

Terrifying, that comparison. With those eyes he

might have seen God; with that mouth he might have spoken to the devil. And because of that, I suppose—though I had never met him before and was not likely to again—I still observed him as steadily as he me. Marked down his dress as prim and neat, fitting more tightly than was usual those days. The refinement of his thin strong hands, and the fastidious manner with which he gently took snuff from a small oblong box. He did this very quietly and noiselessly; using his fingers with great delicacy, and returning it to his pocket in the same gentle manner. Then he turned on his heel and walked away over the stones. And it was then, as I watched his receding figure, that I noticed with even greater surprise the manner of his walk. It struck me as rather odd and extraordinary in comparison with that neatness of dress and habit. The distinct roll from the hips, the rather clumsy swing to the body. Like a sailor.

2

Well, that was my beginning. That, the one day in my life when, had I kept a record of my doings, I would have turned the page over and closed the book forever. That dog's-eared page would be sufficient reminder of every word I spoke since, and every vile and base thing I had done. Would be sufficient jog to my memory of all the days that followed jostling and snarling swift upon each other's heels; of all the damnable things a man may sink to, and the one marvelous thing that can raise him on high, and bend him low with humbleness.

I had been born at Plymouth, but I've no memory of it. I remembered Exmoor, for I went to Blundells from there; but it was Bristol I knew best of all. I had never known my father, and my mother hardly at all. All my life I lived with my aunt, and excepting two short voyages as supercargo of some ship I had never known a day away from her. She had had me with her for close on twenty-two years, and I do not know that I looked forward to much more in my life than that we two might continue to spend it together. There was no one, I think, so gentle, no one so soft in her movements and so gracious in her faded dignity; she had skin as fresh as any girl, even though her hair was white—hands which could touch you so lightly and caress you with unspeakable tenderness, hands which in her very young days must have caused immeasurable joy to some one; and it became my chief delight to know I must have been touched by those hands when I was quite little, and in turn had touched that gentle face and known its smoothness. That was my aunt, Miss Sophia Prescott.

Of my father I knew nothing. I had never asked, or when I did once I could not forget the trouble in my aunt's eyes and the quiet turn of her head before she spoke. I never asked again. But my mother—somehow that was different. In a dim, obscure manner, rather like peering through a mist, I have just the slightest memory of some one who called me "My son, my little lad"; of some one who pressed me to her breast, and let her tears bathe my face, and let

her hair tickle my eyes and whisper again and again, "My son, my little son. . . ." You see it is not even the memory of her face that lives with me now, only of those hot tears and the passionate words she breathed again and again. Had she known it, I would have been content to rest there and listen until eternity, but she did not know, and I did not understand enough; so it was lost to me. Lost and yet lived, as with a dream. For there was something about it I knew, even then, I could never forget, something about its beauty that I was certain must remain with me until I lost all sense of what was beautiful. So that years afterward when my aunt, with great pitifulness, told me she was dead, it was the sudden poignant knowledge I should never hear her speak again which made me cry into my pillow night after night: "Mother, Mother! Speak to me, speak to me!"

3

So much for all those very young memories; so much for all those dim yesterdays; full, almost to overflowing, with all manner and kind of boyish hopes and aspirations. They simply passed; they had no chance of life, I suppose, from the very first, but that I did not know. No chance against the full tide of events which surged and rushed me on forever onward from that very afternoon which also was my birthday. And that I was to know suddenly and very soon. . . .

Birthdays with Aunt Sophia were always things

scenting of mystery and brimming with subdued excitement. Even now it is not so very difficult to remember my aunt, very pink in the cheeks and bright in the eyes, fluttering about from room to room, whispering and nodding, with intense importance to the one little maid, jangling with huge bunch of keys and disappearing into enormous cupboards, to reappear each time with immense bundles of snowy linen or jars of all sorts and kinds of shapes and sizes. This would start early in the morning, and I knew so well the kind of relief which would spread over her gentle face as I said "Good-by" and started down to the wharf. The mystery of it all must not on any account be revealed until my return late that evening. Dear Aunt Sophia!

This birthday, then. Late in the day I returned utterly forgetful of my silent visitor, wrapped about in my own thought, and hugging close to me the very best surprise I could ever spring upon my aunt. For it was exactly as I was prepared to leave the counting-house that old Henry Bride, dry and withered, like the branch of a tree, stilted about his voice, completely devoid of any sort or kind of emotion, called me into his box of a room and made the prosaic suggestion that I should start afresh with him the very next day as a partner, with a very small share in the business, rising gradually year by year. He gave me no time to stammer my delight, but cut me short in his usual stiff manner, offered a pinch of his own sacred snuff, told me he had sent six bottles

of his famous Madeira wine to my aunt, and hobbled out of the place and over the cobbles, looking even more dry and crusty than before.

News! Why, Vernon's capture of Porto Bello was nothing compared to my triumph. I know, as I raced homeward, I started figuring out in exactly what words the name of the firm would be written now. Possibly just "Henry Bride & Co."; after all, I was a very small partner. It might, of course, be "Bride & Comfort"! That I liked well enough, but "Henry Bride, Esquire, and Peter Comfort, Esquire"! That was something very high-sounding and pleasant. It would be on all the ships, too; that was even more splendid, but on the other hand it did away with the "Esquire" and reduced it either to the "Co.," or, possibly, "Bride & Comfort"; I hoped for that form most earnestly. I saw it in smooth white letters dancing over the sea, carrying so much that was wonderful and would be known to all manner of strange lands. . . . "*Flying Swallow*; Bride & Comfort, Bristol." Perfect words!

4

Perfect. Bursting to my lips as I pushed open the door to rush breathlessly into the sitting-room, only to be instantly checked as I stopped and stared and gaped in complete bewilderment. And I had forgotten him. Almost. I think all along I knew that face was unforgettable; it must remain with me even if I never saw it again; and here I was facing it in my aunt's parlor.

He sat in the great carved chair by the window, one hand, as delicate and white as a woman's, resting on the arm; the other showing with most blatant advantage, the cruel twist to the thumb, plucking at that full, red under lip, and fixing me all the time with those marvelous eyes.

My aunt—I had hardly noticed her, and she seemed suddenly a mere gray speck in her corner—whispered, and I could swear to the appeal in her voice:

“This, this—” and stopped and faltered and stared at me more wistfully than ever, her voice coming like a sigh across the hot shadows of the still room.

I shut the door very quietly and stood leaning there, staring at that strange face, even as I had done not so many hours back; but this time I spoke; this time I would have waited hours to hear some sound from those still lips; this time I fancy I would have forced it out, because I hated riddles and he seemed part of one.

I said, “You should know me well enough, sir!”

He made a thoughtful gesture with the one hand, the other still picking at his drooping lip.

“Well enough!” he repeated. “Well enough! And reason to, that I should know you better. Yet that does not matter. For the moment, it seems you are called Peter Comfort. Peter Comfort! Again, I would have named you better; still let that pass. Peter Comfort, and you serve old Henry Bride at the wharf here, whose ships have a trick of being too pretty to be useful, and whose captains are too sweet-spoken

to get the better of rogues, which is the first duty of all honest seamen! I could learn you much you see, Peter Comfort. I have learnt many; that is my business."

He had a voice as hoarse as any raven, yet I suspected he could pitch it louder if he cared. For the moment, that did n't concern me. I was n't even looking at him; I was staring at my aunt; I was watching the color come and go on her face, flush to a sudden red and drain away to a dead white. I could see her lips move and quiver and her hands tremble and twitch at her dress. I knew she was frightened; and I knew her fright had something to do with this stranger who sat in my chair and plucked his mouth and talked as if he had known me all my years—as if he had known my aunt even longer.

I came a little further into the room and asked him, "You might have spoken to me, then, at the counting-house?"

He inclined his head. "I might."

I demanded, "Well, and why not?"

He moved one leg over the other and settled a little more into the chair.

"Possibly I knew your aunt better."

She called out suddenly at that, "Yes, yes, Peter—I know him!" And looked eagerly at us, turning from one to the other. I said gently, for I wanted to try her:

"Why, then, you will introduce us, for it seems he has the advantage of knowing me quite well, while I have no advantage at all."

And she could not answer me; but the color swept again from her cheeks, and her eyes seemed to hold mine in the most desperate anxiety. They were beseeching me, I knew that; yet for what reason? I had no idea of anything except that in some way my aunt was acquainted with this man, and she wanted me to accept that acquaintanceship for her sake; to accept it—and if I sensed anything odd behind her strained manner, to pass it by as if for all the world it was her fear for my tongue that caused her so much trouble.

5

I asked curiously, "Are you nameless, then?"

He answered abruptly: "Why, I have been called many names; some good and some bad, even as I have been known in many lands to many people. By good words and by bad words, with praises from God on High, with curses from the devil beneath! Names! Why, yes, for once I was christened. Given schooling of a kind and took a wife. Once I was married—once I was dead. That is how your aunt would think of me. Dead and only worms left!"

She cried out to him timidly, "Ah! but you forget the years, Jacob; they pass, and there is no returning."

He did not seem to notice her, but continued to me: "There you hear her! She has called me by name. Jacob! A good name that, eh, Peter Comfort? As good a one as yours, and there's not many who'll deny it. Jacob of the Sword, some have it; Jacob of the Red Hand; others, Jacob with the Mouth of Fire."

If there was a snarl in his voice it was a snarl of triumph. My aunt was bending forward, her face hidden in her hands; and I think she was crying, and yet I could not stop him.

He went on: "John Wesley gave me that name. John Wesley told me my use. 'Fire in your eyes,' he said. 'God's fire! Make use of it. Speak by it, live by it, see by it! Lighten the world you pass through as God the Israelites in their journeyings to Canaan!'"

It was my aunt who sprung to her feet, her fingers in her ears, her whole face distraught with grief. "Jacob, Jacob! Much I can stand, but not that. Keep your words to your deeds if must be! But here—I will not hear them here."

I had never seen her like this before, all flushed and hot in the eyes, trembling a little in her body yet, and speaking with such a show of authority that was strange to her. At least it was for me to bear her out; and I did so pretty readily and with as much courtesy as I could summon. "You hear what my aunt says? I think you'll have to change your mood, if you stay."

He looked at me oddly. "I fret folk; I know that. But there're not many who tell me, 'Do this or that,' and look to it being done. Yet I like your way of speaking, friend Peter; we should know more of each other, you and I!"

I don't know how I would have answered him, but at that moment the girl came in and began to clatter with plates and dishes and all the extra preparations for a guest; and then immediately followed the most

curious birthday supper I had ever known. There sat my aunt at her end of the table, seemingly lost in the shadows, looking suddenly very gray and solitary; not knowing quite what to do with the dishes in front of her, touching them with uncertain fingers, and then pulling restlessly at the laces of her gown; while at her left, full in the light, the stranger sat upright and dominant like some all-powerful priest or patriarch, the flare of the candles oddly reflecting in his eyes until they blazed like stars will in some quiet pool. My aunt had a fashion of giving me so many guineas—one for each of my years—hidden in my napkin. It was my clumsiness now that rolled them to the table and floor. I swore and dived with both hands as if each nerve in my body jumped and tingled to their tune. It was the sight of them, I remember, which made him cry scornfully:

“So they sucked ye from a golden spoon, eh, young man? You count your birthdays by your coin; I counted mine with scars and lashings and bloody sweat! One I remember when I kept my belly trim with leaves and grass and screamed for water as a woman will scream against a mouse. Were you my son, your diet would need stiffer swallowing than guineas.”

I think my aunt was forgotten in my fury, which made me cry out in sudden rage against the sneer in his voice. I know I answered him madly:

“Were you my father a thousand times over and called me ‘son’ with each word you spoke, I’d challenge you to make me answer ‘father’ and let that sneer go by unanswered!”

It was crossed swords between us at that. I never saw a face so black or knew so ugly a lip that could stretch out from ear to ear in such a snarl. He grunted out: "The second time, eh? Who taught you to answer so free?"

"A man who never gave me reason to know how loosely a tongue can play in a lady's house."

"A papist, I'll be bound?"

And I, still flinching from his scorn, let out bluntly: "What if he was? He taught me better manners than John Wesley learnt you!"

I had him on the raw then, and saw him wince and haw his breath and then cry passionately, "I learnt of God!" He shouted it again and beat with his fists on the table. "Of God! And let no man unsay me!" He leaned toward me and asked in a kind of savage whisper: "What do you know of God, you with the glib tongue? What do you know? can you answer me that?"

I was pretty much convinced that the man was mad by now, and I tried to answer him easily enough, or at least to humor him. "Why, I know my Bible!"

He flung back his head and gave a huge laugh. "Listen to him; listen to him! He knows his Bible!" Then he thrust one lean white hand that seemed to gleam like steel in the candle-light. "Then you know the hundred and seventh Psalm, eh, young man? You can speak it off with ease like some men rattle out an oath and make no account of it? 'They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters. . . .' In great waters. That's where ye see God!

Ships that move over the seas, they feel God! Land. What is there in earth and clay; can you answer me that? Men walk over the earth and grind their heels into the earth to show their lordship thereon. But on the sea—no man can grind his foot into the sea lest he sink. No man can abuse the sea lest it drown him; no man can look at the sea but he sees God. There! There! There! You worship and you watch, you wait and you see. Marvelous things! Wonderful things. God's things."

6

The room seemed to have faded into obscurity before that burning face and trumpeting voice. I found myself listening as I had never listened before and hearing as if from some tremendous distance the sullen churn of water upon water; the swift rush of wave upon wave.

Jacob with the Mouth of Fire! Was he scorching me? What wonder magic was his to make the seas sing in my ears?

I whispered. "Well, well!" And waited as a child will wait, eager for sweets. He repeated again, "God's things!"

He went on: "I know, I know. Fools there are who tell ye this and tell ye that. Who curse the day they first smelt its salt and turn coward backs and run—run like madmen to get away from it. And yet come sneaking back as men sneak back to God when they lie dying. 'Too much of it!' That's what some cry. Too much and too different. Too much movement. It

never ends; it's never still! And yet, if still, it terrifies. Have you seen such a sea, boy? Have you ever seen water flat and dead and motionless and lost count of time and night and day, while you watched and waited for some ripple even to tell you it still moved? I have; I have! And I have seen splendid seas, running seas, and ships beat up before them like Anson's yellow fleet and bursting sails. I have watched it warm and drowsy, stealing over sands as golden as your guineas there. I have known it frozen deep, deep down, with snow piled up inches thick, and in the blackness of those days seen ice packed up like hills against the sky. All my years, all my years. Counted these marvels and seen the face of God pass over the waters!"

The drumming of the sea was clearer in my ears and in my heart, too, for I had a sudden vision of great tall ships rushing like birds before the wind; of green trees, enormously high, and screaming colored parrots among their branches. Of hot pale cities gleaming like jewels beneath the moon; even as I had seen them, even as I had stared and caught my breath at their beauty when I had gone journeying to the Indies with merchandise.

I cried out: "You need n't tell me! I know; I've seen ships like that. Ships! . . ."

He stared at me muttering: "So. So. Is that it? Well, why not? It gets the young. Like a woman it teases. A wanton way, a cruel wanton way. I followed it to Darien, and I've followed ever since.

I've given it much, and I've taken much; I've hungered and I've been full; it's led me to strange places, and I've seen strange things, bloody things! And I still follow. I still set out on this track and on that, to this quiet and that storm. I'm too old now to slip away inland and hide from its smell; too old. I've done it too long; I must go on doing it. Until my quiet time comes and I drop down into it and find those other mysteries no man knows, no man but he who went before."

There was nothing trumpeting about his voice now; he seemed suddenly wrapped in profound melancholy. He appeared to be looking behind me and beyond, like a dreamer dreaming and held fast by his dreams.

It was my aunt who spoke next, her hands folded on the table edge, her eyes staring at him with intense sadness.

"It was always the same with you, Jacob," she said. "Always the same. This love for the sea, always this restlessness; but what have you learnt from it all, that's what I sometimes have wondered—what have you learnt?"

He muttered heavily, "As much as any man, and more, more!"

She shook her head at him. "To what end, Jacob; to what end?"

He cried out violently: "Woman, have done. Battles, battles, battles all the time; that's been my end." He beat with a clenched hand against his heart and cried aloud: "The wound's been here; the wound's

been sore and twisted deep. I carry my hurt as a slave goes in chains, and none but himself knows the red raw weals that lie beneath."

She persisted: "You were not kind. Secrets—always secrets!"

He made as if to answer furiously, then checked himself and retorted sullenly: "You are a woman; you cannot understand. Things there are in life—men's things—they carry you on, they flash so sudden that they daze with their glittering. *Men's things*; you cannot answer for them."

She asked—and there was in her voice such a note of passion as to make me turn and stare and wonder afresh: "And what of women, Jacob? What of us? What of the little things here at home? Do they not daze? Do they not hurt? What is woman but a frail thing? Has she no heart? Jacob, how much has man to answer for woman; can you tell me that?"

He sprung to his feet as if he were stung and stammered violently: "What care I for women? Of the earth, I tell ye, and I've no say with them! I've cut quit from the land, how many years back, know you. How many reasons, that also ye know. Women! I've no answer for their breed, I've no answer but to the ship I sail in, but to the sea, and the things of the sea."

7

He went on talking until quite late, and some of his sayings I have forgotten, and the few I remem-

ber are of no consequence. One thing I do remember, but it was between my aunt and me after he had gone, and came at the final close of this birthday of mine. We stood in the dim passageway by the foot of the stairs, and she leaned against the wall while I lit her candle and mine, prior to our both going to bed. Something—I cannot explain what—made me ask suddenly.

“That man—you—knew him quite well once?”

She said quietly, “Yes, Peter. Yes, I knew him.”

I was shading the flickering candle with my hand while I asked again, “Did he know my father?”

Her eyes met mine very openly, and she answered steadily, “Yes, Peter, he knew your father,” and stretched for the candle.

As I gave it to her I persisted, “And my mother?”

She took it from my hand and turned her head away so that I could not see her face. I only caught her whisper, “No—not your mother.”

And for the first time I knew she lied to me.

CHAPTER II

I

IF I had gone to her that night and said: "What is it? What is this something that lies between that man and you, that something which has put so much fright into your eyes. Tell me. . . ." how much less wreckage might have been made of her life and mine? If I had twisted her round when she whispered that lie, knowing only some great reason would make her do such a thing, and said to her: "I don't believe that. Tell me the truth. Why are you afraid? What is this secret between that man and you?" I might not have been caught so utterly unawares when all the events that followed heaped so shockingly about my head. Neither might she.

But I didn't. I let her keep her secret. I could see she needed peace then, not my questions, not my perplexities. They could wait.

We met the next morning as if nothing had happened, as if there had been no strange visitor to my birthday supper, as if it had passed in its usual simple way, and that secrets could never lie between us. I told her then the glad news about my partnership with old Bride, and she put her hands on my shoulders and held me for the moment tightly, and

whispered over and over again, "How glad I am, Peter dear; so glad!"

We were in the garden then; a little bit of a thing, all fruit-trees bursting with blossoms, and all manner and kind of big and little flowers scenting the mild morning air.

We walked there for a while before I started to the wharf. There was a little seat at one end, and we sat there while she bunched together the few buds she had gathered to pin in my coat, and every now and then she would stop and touch my arm and whisper, "How glad I am, Peter, how glad!" And once she said very low, "This would have pleased your mother; she would have laughed and cried."

I asked her then, "Was she like you—my mother?"

She shook her head and smiled up at me. "Much prettier. Ah, so pretty!"

I said, "Well, I've never met a woman yet so sweet."

She laughed and held up a reproving finger. "Peter, Peter! Why, I am gray, and I think I always have been! She—I look at my garden—at all the flowers, and I think there never was so fair a one as she."

I said with sudden desperation, "Am I like her at all?"

"She was little, you know, Peter," my aunt said musingly. "You could pick her up so easily, her son! But you have her eyes and her fairness; yet not that fair, fair look that made her seem so young and delicate and almost strange, half spirit, half child, and then, suddenly, all woman."

I asked suddenly, "Was she happy?"

I saw my aunt pause and gather up the flowers and smell them and keep them to her face before she answered. She said very slowly:

"She was born for happiness. It should have been hers always. It was hard for her; she was young, and sometimes life is difficult for young people—for women especially. You must remember that. Sometimes they cannot see as men would have them see. Moments there were in her life—one when you were born—when her happiness made you turn away because of the fear that it could not last, and it meant so much to her—so much!"

I muttered beneath my breath, "And yet she left me."

And my aunt heard and caught hold of me and cried imploringly; "Ah, no, Peter, never say so, in that way. One day you will leave me, because life is made up of partings, and meetings."

I said savagely, "*Then* she was happy?"

She said sadly: "Why, she only lived two years longer; such a short time. Yet if she was happy, you, least of all, would not grudge her that little happiness. She needed it; she needed to follow her heart. There are some women who must; some are like that. It is easy to be hard on them, those who do not know; chance does not come to all."

I swung round and asked abruptly, "This—this man, was he good to her?"

She nodded wisely. "None was better; if she were not happy it was not his fault."

I said quickly, "Mine, then?"

She put out her hand, and her fingers closed about my palm. "She wanted you to come to her one day when you were older, when things perhaps would be more settled in their lives; he was a Jacobite, and they had no home. She died speaking of you. Linking your two names together as the two who made her smile while she lived. She loved you both. She was yours for the first part and his for the last. One day maybe you will meet and talk of her together; that was her wish. She would not, then, have followed her heart in vain."

I asked, "Where is he now?"

She shook her head. "I do not know; he serves his master, and you must find him before you seek John Fortescue Eskdale." Her eyes seemed suddenly dim, and her voice but a murmur as she repeated: "John Fortescue Eskdale. You must remember that name because of your mother. He was a reddish man, with eyes that laughed, and he went with a limp. It was because of that that he became too well known after the Atterbury Plot; so he risked so much. He lodged with us for some time during that year. I have forgotten how that came about; we never knew him for a Jacobite until—until your mother loved him, and then such things as politics did n't matter. . . ."

She roused herself with a sigh and a smile and got to her feet, giving little pokes and pats to the neat little lunch she had made.

"There, now, Peter; you and I are dawdling, and

that is very wrong on such a morning as this. Such a grand morning! Hurry along and enjoy every bit of it, and come back and tell me all, for I would share this day with you, my dear, if you will let me."

2

Happy day! Ah, such a swagger of a day.

We drank wine, old Bride and I, as, with his lawyer and senior clerk for witness, the thing was accomplished. We solemnly toasted the newly born firm of "*Bride & Comfort, West India Merchants and Shippers.*" And as I faced him now across the big desk in his room, I knew that from now on that side was mine, and in the mornings I would cross the gaunt counting-house and my old quiet corner into the privacy of that tiny room, and with my key open my desk and tilt my chair, and shape my pen, in so lordly a fashion as would become so splendid a fellow as Peter Comfort, Esquire, of Bride & Comfort.

There were countless other happenings on that day of days, all of which added to its perfectness, but they are of little consequence here. One thing, though; and I repeat it because it bears very largely on the main matter of this story. Two of our captains came in, and I remember how amused I was at their amazing politeness toward me, when at other times I had received nothing better than a surly nod.

It was of one of them, drinking my health very loudly, and calling me "Y' Honor" with every breath, that I suddenly asked:

"Have you ever crossed a man called Jacob with the Mouth of Fire?"

He swallowed his wine at a gulp, and spluttered through his whiskers, "Jacob! Jacob with the Mouth of Fire?" And stared with bulging eyes and muttered further into his beard. "Some men have," he said slowly, "and some have not." He looked at me oddly as if he would have asked a question, and then stared down at the floor and went on. "'T is a strange name, and it fits a strange man, but he's never crossed my track and he plies his own trade. Some says it's of God; some says of the devil! But sailors tell he leaves a bloody trace behind him, and when they smell it they luffs about and keeps away; there's naught but bad to be got if ye follow it up too close!"

I would have asked him more, but he seemed suddenly glum and ill at ease, and only kept on muttering, "They luffs about and keeps away. . . ." and filled his glass again and sat lumpishly in the depths of his chair, as if I had offended him.

I was kept late that evening, and would have been later still owing to the arrival of the *Flying Swallow* with papers to be checked that night. I was staying on, when old Bride suggested I should take them back with me and bring them down later, after supper, when he would be there also to put his signature. I said I would bring them to his house and if necessary take them on board the ship afterward, but he would not hear of it, saying he had many private papers to go through that evening and he would work at them

until late if need be; I would surely find him there, however late I might be. So we parted on that understanding, he turning into the noisier street where his lodgings lay, and I to the quieter where my aunt awaited me. Something, I know not what, made me turn after taking a dozen steps and look back at him through the crowded streets. There was something very solitary in that thin, wizened figure, moving slowly and cautiously yet with a certain dignity. I know I wished I had offered him a helping arm, yet I also knew how cold and stilted his refusal would have been. The mere thought of it made me smile, for I knew so well that very chilliness was but a cloak to cover a heart as gentle as a woman's; it was this thought, I fancy, which made me raise my hat in silent and respectful salute.

3

It was a great deal later when I started back to the wharf. A dark night, made gloomier yet by a thick fog which hung motionless and clammy about the town and river. It stood about in a stifling white mass, suffocating and warm, tickling my eyes and muffling my ears, making me feel my way with as much caution as if I had been blind; and I know, as I groped along, it seemed to press against me like something alive and unnatural. It seemed to close around and box me in as if it had been solid and immovable, like an immense wall. And out of this, time and again, figures would loom up like ghosts with the mist clinging to their garments and peer at me, as I

would at them, as if for all the world we were wraiths moving mysteriously through a ghostly world.

I know a lighted tavern came almost as a relief in this perpetual whiteness, and I paused and stared through the window and envied the snugness of its occupants and its comfortable security. There was a man and woman dancing, I remember; while a whole gang stood around and applauded their lumpish steps, for I think they were both very drunk; and even as I watched, the man fell away from the woman's clasp and sprawled heavily to the ground, only to be trampled on beneath the feet of his companions, who surged forward and caught at his partner, dragging her about in a kind of wild fandango. . . . It was just after I had left their noisy friendliness, and been once again swallowed up into the mist, that I heard a laugh—the laugh.

The laugh, because I had never heard anything like it, because it did not seem human, because it came out of the silence with such unexpected suddenness that I twisted about on my heels and peered this way and that as if I expected to see the fog itself turn into some horrible shape and shriek dreadful laughter into my ears. And then instantly all was silent again; not a movement, not a sound, only the drumming of my own heart, which seemed so loud I expected it to echo again and again, like the crashing of thunder through the night; only that foolish nervous beating and the stifling pressure of the mist.

I don't know how long I stood listening. I don't know how long it was until that maddening beating

stopped and I could walk on more steadily, it seemed hours to me; it seemed then as if the weight of the fog was pressing me down so that I could not move; yet I suppose it was but a few seconds only, and I know when I went on I hurried. . . . If I could have seen I would have run.

I suppose that sudden desolate laugh must have startled me more than I realized, because I know as I stumbled along the wharf I kept on hearing things. I kept on starting and listening, and once I swung round in a kind of panic because I fancied I heard feet closing up behind me, and then feet passing me and rushing ahead; and all the time the fog seemed to thicken and muffle up against me, heavy and sodden, and run in water over my face and neck, until my clothes clung to me and seemed to stifle and hinder me in my hurry.

It was at the door that I heard it again, while I fumbled with the latch and tried to get my breath before I entered. Surely at my ears now. Yet as I jerked round in its direction it soared away to the very housetops, like the forlorn shriek of some unknown creature of the night, rang out with a rattle and a twist, and died away mournful and sobbing.

Nothing like it! Nothing, I swear, on the face of the earth. Surely no man could laugh like that, but only the devil himself, with some infernal caprice on foot splitting his sides over it. With a sudden effort I slipped the latch and stumbled into the room, crashing the door behind me.

4

Once inside, I breathed again; there was something very friendly in that great lumbering door, something very protective in the solidity of its inches. At least it shut away that blinding fog; at least I could see well enough, for even here white wreaths of mist curled and drifted about the rafters, puffing up against the walls.

Steadier now in my thoughts and feelings, I began to realize the place was extraordinarily quiet. A weird feeling of desolation; a kind of 'swept and garnished air,' as if every kind of life had gone clean out of it; as if it had never been inhabited and never would be again. Yet I knew that old Bride was there already; the light told me that. It was out of the question that he would have come and gone; it was out of the question, also, that he had not heard that slam of the door and called from his inner room. Yet there seemed to be no movement even from there, no rattle of papers or scrape of a chair; and then I suddenly realized there was no light under his door. It was standing open, and through that space there was nothing but darkness. I stared at the lantern; obviously he had been there. I supposed something or other must have called him away. If that was so it must have been something very important; otherwise it was odd. I wondered if he had left some message, and crossed to the long row of desks at the further end. And then I saw him, leaning right forward against one of the desks, seemingly asleep.

It surprised me that the door had not awakened him; it amused me to think such an indefatigable worker could drop so easily asleep. It amused me also to wonder what he would have to say when he did wake.

He was leaning sideways on the desk, his cheek resting there, one arm curved above him, the other loose at his side; his wig had fallen off, and his head seemed very round and white against the dark wood-work.

I put out a hand and touched him, and then, because he did not stir, caught hold of him and shook him—gently at first, and then in sudden alarm more roughly; and it was not until then that I noticed though his shoulder moved beneath my grasp, it seemed to drag, and his head to pull away rather from my hand. It was dark in that corner. Too dark for me to see as I stooped forward and stared closely at him; or to understand or make common sense of what I thought I saw. I caught up the light and pressed it down close to that bald, shining head, and then I saw plainly it was spiked there; right beneath the lobe of the ear thrust out a knife-handle, and the blade passed clean through his neck, pinning it down to the desk. . . .

It was while I stared, shocked, and only half understanding, the door crashed open, and there, with a great cloud of fog, advanced into the light a little strutting man, with an immense wig, and an immense hat topping it, dressed in scarlet and yellow, swinging a lantern in one hand and a cane in the other,

talking over his shoulder to some one who was following, talking very shrilly and peevishly.

“ ’T was no business of mine; ’pon wig, ’t is plaguy mean of you to say so! Death has a speedy way with him, and the thing was done before I could hold him off. Yet what matter? A wretch of a man, I say; a villain of most stubborn habits. . . . ” Then he saw me, and his jaw dropped and his lantern swung helplessly. He shrilled loudly: “Whom have we here? A boy? Was there ever such a misfortune!”

I was n’t looking at him. I was staring at his companion, carefully busy with the door, now stepping leisurely into the room. I was staring at him and he at me, as we had done only a day back in the full glare of the sun. And as on that day, he was noiselessly taking snuff, snapping his delicate fingers to be rid of any trace of the powder. Jacob with the Mouth of Fire. He said, slowly:

“I am sorry for this, boy,” and jerked his head toward the dead man. “Sorry. Yet, I think, sorrier for you. You have lost your partnership, Peter.”

I heard the little man squeak out, “Plague on it, then you know him? Amazing!”

But he meant nothing to me. All the blood had rushed to my head at the sound of that hoarse voice; I felt it drumming and roaring there like a great sea.

I said thickly: “Your work! Your work! Murder here! Is this your trade?”

He had no chance to answer, for the red-coated man, darting twinkling glances between the two of us, screeched out: “Be damned for a rascal! Does he

think you stoop to such trifles? A most monstrous notion! A most crazy rogue!"

I took no notice of him; I doubt if I saw him; he looked a mere grotesque splotch of red in that shadowy room. I went on:

"Your hand here! Your hand, and you eat with it at my aunt's table, eat with it and killed with it! Name of God, you shall answer for this!"

He said smoothly: "I like your spirit, Peter; I told ye that before. I like it well. . . . That man—" and he pointed with one lean finger. "He is dead. A man once dead, why, there's an end to him. To waste words on dead men is foolishness; and I have things to say of living men, and worth the talking on."

There was something devilish in his callousness; something devilish in his staring face and rasping tongue.

I cried at him: "Talk to the watch, not to me! Talk to the hangman, if you've pluck enough. They slit the tongues, I hear, of those who cut throats."

There came a sort of choke from the other man; he really was staring at me as if I was mad. If I had not been so crazed with rage I could have laughed at the dismay in his little round eyes and the ridiculous pouting of his stupid lips. He squeaked:

"How he goes on! Shall I prick him the slightest to still his naughty talk?"

I swung round on him then, bawling so close to his ears that he positively skipped: "Was it you, then? Were two of you needed against one little man?"

He shrilled back: "Passion of my heart, this is positively insulting. Do you not know who I am, boy? I—" He beat his chest with two brown tight fists, and screamed wrathfully: "I. . . . Pascal Aurilly Nicolas Sainte-Jeanne de Tavenny! I, to soil my hands with a mere withered pole of a storekeeper? I, with such a name, with such a sword! Was there ever such insolence?"

Came the scornful voice of Jacob. "You go too far, Pascal. He knows nothing of you; why should he? He knows less of me—"

And I cut in, snarling at him: "I know enough! You shouted your names at me; you linked them with the Bible and made them righteous! I'll give you another, a name from God, Cain! Let that fit you! Cain the killer."

He stared at me immovable; he plucked at his under lip and fixed me with gleaming eyes; he shook his head slowly and even mournfully; he answered grimly:—"Names, name. I'll give you one. 'Father'; what of that? Fitting enough you should name me so, even as I would call you 'son'! You are my son, Peter."

5

I might have been standing all this while on the edge of an abyss, and now I was falling, falling—crashing through space and hearing, as if from an immense distance, that hoarse voice repeating, "My son Peter, I am your father." Crashing on and down it seemed with everything reeling before me; and then gradually

there reached me a thin falsetto cry, which I knew came from the man Pascal:

“This staggers belief! Son? And never a quiver of a lid to any wench! You need not have been so plaguy short to my troubles. Sons enough have I in every quarter of the sea, and may they perish ere they croak ‘father’ in my ear! Damme, ’t is not as if you showed vexation, either; yet body and soul the rascal would swing you if you gave him the rope.”

I had reached the bottom, I suppose. They were both still there, and I had not been dreaming; the one with obvious dismay on his face, now as red as his coat, the other taking more snuff and fixing me soberly enough the while.

I stammered at him: “Lying, lying! Did I not know you for a liar? Why should I call you my father?”

He tapped the lid of the snuff-box with meditative fingers and said thoughtfully, “Because of your mother, I suppose.”

There came a kind of a titter from Pascal; he flicked in the air with his handkerchief and giggled stupidly. “No wench but a swift one! As the song goes,

“If woman could be fair and not too fond . . .”

It was as if the color of his coat scorched my eyes and made me see him through a red mist; he was a little man, and I, beside him, like a giant, but his wig was gigantic and cumbersome and my hands seemed thumbs, as in my fury I caught him at the neck and shook him until his ungainly hat flopped on the ground.

I would have throttled him but for that damned wig. I would have crushed every note of that vilely singing throat forever; but other hands caught hold of mine, dragging sinewy fingers locked about mine, while there came sharp words in my ears:

“Leave go, boy! Pascal, get from that pistol!”

And his strength was greater than the two of us; the length of his arm came between us like the mast of a ship. He released me immediately, but kept his hold on Pascal, whom he addressed violently:

“Your tongue will trip you yet, Pascal. Why, you dog, must I yard-arm you? Touch those pistols again, and by the ship I sail in, I’ll nail you to its front and make a figurehead of your simpering face.”

I have never seen a man so furious and yet so utterly cowed as Pascal was then. With hands which positively trembled with passion, he straightened his wig and groped for his hat and he screamed at the top of his voice:

“’Pon wig, you presume too far! Body and soul of me, look to the yard-arm yourself! Quarterdeck ways are not for all! Not for all, I say!”—shaking his fists—“and others can tell you that. Others who love you not and would see you sunk deep with the devil and his dam for company! I’m done with you. You may hang for all I care! Hang—”

He went on; screaming and stamping, his wig all to one side, his hat to the other. And the object of his fury took not the slightest notice but went on talking to me as if he and I were the only two there.

He said: “Hark ye, Peter, keep clear with him;

soft he looks, and soft he is with his stomach and his temper; the mood wears but the heart remains. 'T is the heart of a cunning dog, Peter; the heart of a cunning dog and a snarling vixen."

I asked him grimly: "And what of yours? You call me son, and in the face of it murder my oldest friend! You bid me call you father, but the very sight of you strikes terror in my aunt's face!"

He said broodingly, "Did I not say 'men's things'; how can women follow them?"

I said: "Murder. Is that one of them?"

He retorted impatiently, "I did not kill the man."

"Your friend, then?"

He started to pluck at his lip again. "The man had money, much of it, and to what end? He was old, neither had he wife or children. 'T was Pascal's business more than mine; he learnt some ship came in with a rich cargo aboard. He knew my ways; he came for it. An easy, bloodless matter it might have been, but it seems for one so old, the man was agile and foolish. They stopped his tongue just as the watch was passing. Well, noisy men are better confined, and his moneys put to better purpose by my hands."

I cried out, "You tell me this, you—my father!"

He said: "What else? Since there have been secrets enough these years past, let us end them!"

I said dully: "Better have let them be. Why should we know each other, you and I?"

He said curiously, "Do you hate me so?"

"Why, I hardly know you," I told him. "Hate you? For what? For leaving my mother, and then

scorning the very thought of her? For ringing yourself about with murderous cutthroats? Have I not reason enough? Hate you! 'Fore God, I would shout the watch and see you hung from the highest steeple, yet I cannot because you are my father. Because of the shame; because of my poor mother. Those are the reasons why I hate you! Those—none else!"

He said: "Why, I like ye for it. Come with me, Peter; come with me and loose your spirit the more. Give it room to breathe, to move. Here—here it must stifle, walk in chains. Let it go free, boy. I can show you the way."

I hated him all the more for his earnestness. I answered furiously, "Never, while I live; never on this earth!"

He took no notice, but went on: "I have a ship, Peter. I would have ye see her. I would have ye know her loveliness and watch the wonder of her sails caught by the sun. She moves like a bird; she sails like a swan. Her own shadow is more perfect than any ship of Anson's. If you could feel her under you, if you could see her one with the wind, you would not stay here; by God, you would be gone!"

There was the trumpet again! The glow of the visionary, the passion of the seaman. I answered him:

"What sort of ship? What sort of life? 'Business in great waters. . . .' A bloody trade, is that it? A vile name yours, with viler meanings? I am your son—I will remember that: my years will be spent remembering. But not with you. I have been robbed of father-

hood, and you the thief! You should do well to think of that when you go out upon your business on the sea!"

He stared at me sadly. I thought then he had lost some of his complete assurance; all his years seemed stamped upon his face. If he fumbled for words he was saved speaking them, for the man Pascal came mincing suddenly up to me, apparently once more at perfect ease, patting his face with his handkerchief, very bright in the eyes and strutting on his legs. He said instantly:

"The neatness of that stroke is masterly." He waved a plump hand in the direction of old Bride. "The man's a marvel; not a jot of blood, but a neat hole with no graze of the skin."

I returned bitterly, "I'm glad you approve!" and walked toward the dead man, sick at heart.

He followed, remarking airily: "I hate a rough stroke; 't is natural with gentlemen. One thrust, and the matter is spent; there is no taste in those who prick and slash. 'T is parlous clumsy."

He bent closer to the body, yawning the while, then suddenly snapping his teeth together, cried out, "Hell! this is plaguy awkward," and with a strength he did not seem capable of, caught the knife-handle and drew it clean away so that the body fell to the ground with a dull thud. He took no notice of that or my heated exclamation; he seemed all intent on the knife. He said sharply and with much interest:

"Damme, a strange knife. I might have guessed an English handle." With a little bow he handed it, hilt

forward, to me. "You know it? 'Pon wig, 't is ill for you!"

There was a devilish slyness in the grace of that presentation. It was on his face, too; I could see that, clearly. I caught the thing, clotted with blood, and stared at it with a sudden new dismay.

I heard my father (I must call him that now) cry, "What trick is that, Pascal?"

And he answered indignantly: "Trick? Hang me, you're free with your words. Do I kill men with one knife and stick them down again with another? Ask Death—his the pricking. Ask your own rascal here. He is your breeding, not mine."

He was not listening. With a savage twist he had the knife out of my hand and was demanding, "You know this?"

I said listlessly, "My name is marked there."

He shouted at Pascal, "Devil's spawn, what mess is this?" And to me again, "They'll truss you up for this, Peter!" And then with a sudden eager note, "The will of God; you sail with me."

I shouted back at him, "I'd rather hang," and listened to my voice echoing away in the rafters.

He said earnestly: "By God, not that. Think boy, think! Death of a common cutthroat! I give you life!"

And I shouted again: "You give me poison. Life of the foulest kind."

There was fury in both of us then. I would have sprung at his throat had he put out a hand and touched me, and he like a great baffled hawk, his hands twitch-

ing and his lips drawn back like the snarl of an animal. It was as we both stood, and Pascal leaning against the wall his legs crossed, humming beneath his breath, there came again that laugh in the fog.

In the room this time. I spun round and peered in the shadows. In the roof surely, for I know a bat with a sudden squawk flew violently from one side to the other. Like as before it came on a kind of howl and drifted away like an intense solitary crying.

I heard Pascal carelessly say, "Death, on his rounds."

And I cried aloud: "Another of your tricks? Some hell-cat of yours?"

They did n't answer. They were looking both toward the door to which I had my back. I saw my father suddenly put to his lips a whistle, and before I could spin round there came its shrill blast. Instantly it seemed a band of steel was about my neck, pressing my windpipe until a great column of red washed before my eyes, until the blackness of a night I have never known of closed down and shut away my senses. . . .

CHAPTER III

I

OUT of the depths into which it seemed I was sunken, through the blackness which covered me, there came shapes appearing familiar, some of them, yet oddly distorted and grotesque; shapes, and with them snatches of words which conveyed no meaning to me. I know I hurt most vilely; I yearned to lie straight, and this I could not do. My bed seemed to be heaved about, my poor body rocked to and fro, and with every glimmer of light there would come such tremendous heaving that I would sink away again, almost with relief, into that pitch darkness which seemed interminable night and in which I fought and struggled against those vile shapes. It was these forms which terrified me so; I did not recognize them, or if I did there seemed some horror between them and my flickering sense, and they terrified me all the more.

There was one which seemed a gigantic mouth, a great slit of a thing bearing resemblance to a huge gaping pit; and from it there would come continual laughter until I used to think the world could only be made up of such hideous sound. It haunted me. I would scream aloud to some God for pity; then it would vanish. Instead there would be two great eyes

shining like stars, wonderful things from which surely would come peace. I would stretch to them even, and then as they bent nearer shut my own in wild despair as if I only sensed harm beneath their quiet serenity. Often it was a wig, ludicrous in its size, swollen to extraordinary thickness, connected in some way with a squeaking voice. A voice that would constantly sing; and I know there came the day when I caught a line of that song, and I knew I had heard it before—and it had infuriated me then even as it infuriated me now. That thin piping, singing voice:

“And then we say when we their fancy try
To play with fools, O what a fool was I!”

Cords seemed to be snapping in my brain; light—surely to God, light was coming at last? With an effort I was sitting up croaking meaningless words in the direction of that song, tearing with foolish, helpless fingers at some person or other who was now bending over me shouting to some one I could not see:

“Out of this, Pascal; out of it!” And then to me: “Lie still, boy; he’s done; lie still. Let this fever pass; it’s done harm enough; lie still.”

I could have kissed those hands which held me and the voice which had so marvelously ceased that hateful tune; yet as the face bent closer to me, I knew it too well, and my whole heart ached and sickened within me because of all it so suddenly re-

membered. I turned my face away and muffling my head cried as I had not done for years past.

2

I suppose I must have slept after that outburst of grief, and I believe that sleep eased my sorrow. I only know that when I woke fully to consciousness I recognized that mine was a harder outlook than before. A dulled and bitter heart, but no grief there; I was stiffening afresh for what yet might come. That I was on a ship I think I must have known even in those hideous nightmares. The knowledge of it now gave me no surprise: I only wondered vacantly what manner of ship and how far from Bristol we were likely to be now.

I lay in a berth in her roundhouse, while at the center-table, his back set to me, was my father reading, a great chart set in front of him, a long clay pipe at his elbow.

My father! Well, he had tricked me. I was to watch him each day and every day; I was to talk with him. That was the fashion between fathers and sons. I turned away, trying to make as little sound as possible. I could not bear to hear his voice yet. There was a window at my side, open on to a small space of deck. I was too weak to raise myself, but it was just possible for me to see out, to notice first a man squatting there, intent on priming his pistols; and so still and occupied he looked like a figure of bronze in the glare of the sun; then of a sudden he flung back his head

and burst into song, the words of which it was easy to hear:

“The *George*, holla! came from the south,
From the Coast of Barbary-a;
And there he met with brave gallants of war,
By one, by two, by three-a.”

I had sung that song myself. I hated the thing now, and I hated the man who sang it and turned from him to stare at the sea, which stretched like a huge plain as far as my eyes could make out. Perfectly still and wonderfully green; just a thin white ribbon of froth which marked the line of our going. Nothing in sight. Yet somewhere beyond that white line, somewhere behind that green sea was land. I was conscious of a great desolation, of enormous loneliness. I supposed my father had heard me, for I suddenly realized he was at my side bending to me with a mug.

He was saying: “Wine and water; drink it down boy. It’s what you need.”

I drank it down eagerly. There was something very cool and delightful in its taste, and for the first time since my waking, I felt the slightest strength. When I had finished he stood at my side awkwardly pulling his broad sash, staring at me as if he had much to say and could not find the tongue to speak it. I asked:

“How far out are we now from Bristol?”

He answered, “Seven days,” and pulled the sash all the more.

I whispered, “Seven days!” and then “My aunt: what of my aunt?”

He spoke shortly. "She knows; I saw to it that word was sent."

I felt a kind of sickening in my heart at the kind of word it would have been. The brutal gist of the message. I had a vision of my aunt receiving it; reading it. Who would have taken it? That did not matter. The letter was the thing, its meaning. I said with an effort:

"Why have I been ill so long?"

"Our boat smashed into a ship at anchor," he told me. "The fog was a blanket, and our eyes saw but to the edge of it. You were sunk like a stone, senseless as you were. It was searching and swimming and trusting to touch to get ye aboard." He stopped, to add lamely: "Little good came to any man from so long a wetting; the fever held. But it passed with the last watch; ye should go easier now."

I turned from him again to stare along the deck. There was the slightest ruffling to the sea; sudden white splashes showed in the distance; there came the puff of wind in my face. The man out there also seemed to have noticed it, for he was now on his feet, smelling the air like a horse its stable; and even as I watched he turned and walked forward singing loudly as he went:

"Blow, my bully boys, blow—O,
For I'd like to turn and go—O,
Away along the main
Where the glory that is Spain
Waits to stuff your lockers full both
high and low—O!"

I turned to my father, now smoking at the table, and asked savagely: "Why am I here? Why?"

"They would have hanged you from the town walls like a common cutthroat."

I tried to laugh, but it ended nearer a sob. "A brave reason that to stuff your conscience with! You got me. Kidnapped, is that it?"

I saw the blood rush into his cheeks and then ebb as quickly away, leaving it a more sickly yellow than before. But he answered steadily, pulling at his pipe the while:

"There's a twist of scorn to your tongue, Peter. 'Kidnapped'—an odd word between father and son."

I said, bitterly: "What sort of father? A stranger unknown to me; with curious names and strange friends. You left me long enough to go my own ways; what should there be between the two of us now?"

He retorted sullenly: "Once I came to you, and you were gone and your traces covered with a prettiness I did not expect from a woman. Twice I came seeking where they had hidden you; but you were at school, and your aunt, like a wildcat with her cub rather than name it me. Three times I came and found my luck with the third, for no woman should turn me about and put me on one side. I had told her that; I swore an oath to it! Yet the years that came were too full and the days all too short, and I am no free man as you would think. I had to bide my time, and take my risk before I could learn where she had hidden you and come ashore."

I cried out: "It was a brutal thing to take her peace and give no reason, but an old man dead and the stain of his murder at her very door!"

He said savagely: "Why, boy, would you lie at her breast all your years? Is there no spunk in ye that ye cannot seek life of a sterner sort than at her side, or checking accounts with some hoary dotard for your playmate?"

I said violently: "Have you shown me anything better? You did the killing, not I! You talk of saving my neck, but a word from you and you could have done a more fatherly act than this—this imprisoning."

He winced at that but stared at me with moody eyes. "Did I not say I am no free man? Pascal alone would have seen to it than ye were left with your throat slit did I not take ye myself."

I stammered out: "Why? Why?"

"Why? Your tongue, boy; they would not have trusted it were you my son or no, and my word on it! 'Fore God, an English port, a citizen murdered, a strange brig at anchor; a babbling tongue, and to top it all a king's ship in the bay and a fog that might have helped but more than likely hindered. Did I not tell ye Pascal was all cunning? You would never have reached your aunt's skirts breathing, but as a corpse brought in by the watch!"

I said stubbornly: "Are you not master here? Or were you so full of fear you could not speak for your son?"

He burst out: "Ah, still your tongue! Afraid,

I? There's not a man among them whose neck I would not twist as I do this pipe—"and break and fling aside—" and he tossed the fragments from him—"if he crossed my path and fell foul o' my ways!" He drew a great breath, glaring furiously, and then added more calmly: "We've our own yard-arm, and ye shall see how we dance men there when we think fit. But hark ye, young Peter, to give up one man to English law would be to give the whole ship full and bloody fighting at that! You'll learn how; you'll learn why; for ye had to come, boy, and ye've got to stay."

It was then I asked—and I know the suspicion I had had all along became suddenly very much a-cock and set my heart beating wildly: "What should I learn from you? What are you? What trade? What port?"

He stretched for another pipe at the rack against the wall, and filled it with a great plug of tobacco before he answered. And then said, with great soberness:

"Of no port and no master. Of the sea; of God!" I whispered, "Pirates, is that it?"

His great brows furrowed into so thick a line, his eyes seemed set in caverns. He retorted violently, "Did I not say of God?" And then added more quietly: "I work my business here. What men call it I care not. I set my watch over and about the sea; did I not tell you how well I knew it? I suck from it as a bee sips its honey; I store up my treasure under the sight of heaven; I make my offering like

Jacob's ladder up to the stars; the stars, Peter, which are the seat of the Almighty."

3

In the silence which followed came an order overhead and the scurry of feet along the deck. All this while the weather must have been steadily freshening, and I could now hear the sullen flogging of the sails while sudden great tremblings passed through the ship. We were moving apace; pushing on and on to what manner of adventure I dared not contemplate. I had met my father. I had met a most infamous villain whose traffickings might yet lead him to a most infamous end. But I was his son. I was born of him, and I supposed dully it was in the nature of things this meeting should come about one day. One dreadful swift moment, and I was looking on him sick and amazed; and then, hating him, hating him fiercely and suddenly because of my mother. And it must have been the quick memory of her which made me whisper:

"It was because of this my mother left you—"

He seemed completely taken aback. His jaw dropped very loose and he breathed hard, like a man will, groping for words. Then with a snarl and a rush they came toppling over each other in his cold fury:

"'T was a dog of a papist, a rogue of a Jacobite, who won her with scented smiles and honeyed words! Look you, boy; I traded as others of my kind; from coast to coast, from that ill to this luck. I filled my

purse that way—'fore God, I filled it for her. But she laughed at our vows and turned a wanton cheek and went as a town bird singing to the voice that cooed so prettily to her."

I felt the most horrible drumming in my head as he spoke. I knew the blood seemed to rush up to it like a great wave and scorch it red-hot, and then rush away and leave it ice-cold. I was risen on my pillows shouting:

"You lie, you lie! You know you lie! She had a right, I tell you, a right; you should know that well enough."

The flame of his lip seemed then the most devilish thing as if puffed out like a great trembling red tulip, while he blared out:

"The tongue of Moloch have you? What right was hers? That of a trollop? Her lover?"

There came a gust of wind like the humming of a gigantic top which lurched the ship and sent the wine crashing to the ground. I don't think either of us noticed it. I think we saw nothing but each other's face, and listened for nothing except each spoken word; and for that we lay in wait, ready to spring out and shake and tear it like a dog a rat. I was crying out now:

"She was my mother, I tell you! Mine; and I was her son long before I was yours!" With a whistle and a scream, that gust seemed to pass, and now there only came an increased moaning from the shrouds and plunging of the ship herself. I went on: "You gave her the right to leave you; it was hers to take after

those solitary frightening years of waiting. What do you suppose they meant to her in her loneliness? What did she get out of them? Nothing from you, but possibly from different ships stray words which terrified her, odd sayings that struck such a terror into her poor heart that she fled the place. Because of you. Remember that—because of you and her sudden learning of what you were!"

He was rocking now on his feet, his fingers tearing and clutching one at the other, his face no more than a yellow mask, flaked on the jaw with stained red froth.

"I was her husband—husband. . . ."

I said dully, "You should have remembered that earlier."

He flashed back, "I'll answer for my memory at the judgment seat!"

I retorted, "You've pluck."

He cried vehemently: "Still with your scorn! I work with my God; I answer to my God—none else!"

I muttered, "You talk; I should be afraid to talk so, and trade so."

He said puzzled, "Why, I have a covenant with God"—and stopped and started again that heavy labored breathing and fell to gnawing his fingers, uncertain and hesitant. I noticed once again the thrill to his voice, the gleam in his eyes. It made me move uneasily and set a new trail of thought in my mind.

I said, slowly, "A covenant, you?"

He retorted with sudden fierceness: "Why not? Am I stuck so fast in the pit I may not see the

light?" Then he said more quietly, "John Wesley baptized me, turned my face round about so I might see my inner man and know it as a vile thing, and watch it freshen out by the grace of God."

I said amazed: "Wesley—Wesley! Gave you leave to charter a ship, to cut down other ships with it? Wesley blessed you?"

He said with great solemnness, "Is it not written, 'The voice of the Lord is upon the waters'?" He flung his arm wide and exclaimed with extraordinary passion: "I am the trumpet of God. I make my war for Him here, on the seas. I ride on the flood and fight on the flood; as Cromwell on the plains, so I with my ship."

I cried out: "God? What have your ways to do with God?"

He was sitting at the table again, leaning there, his head thrust forward, his face agleam with triumph, and I know again I was forced to marvel at the serenity of his eyes and their steadfast beauty.

He said hoarsely: "Peter, I sinned once, and I live now to wash out that sin. There was not a ship but I did not set full sail at her to stain her decks and reel like a drunkard in the riot of her death. I drank my fill and took my fill and lived like a princeling, decked out in crimson and silk." He drew a great breath, and cried with sudden savageness: "I tell ye, Peter, it pricked me sore when your mother went with a papist! Then—I slashed and burst my way to every haunt and refuge of theirs. Hunted them in their holes; scorched them out to toast them brown and

leave them strung by their thumbs like so many crows. Then!" He was on his feet beating his breasts and shouting aloud: "Then it was for me, for my purpose, for my passion! Now it is for God I seek them down, for God I chase them, for God I chant on high as I track them down, run them down, rush and harry and cut them down, down through the seas until they shake and tremble at the wrath of the Most High!"

4

With his words came a sudden vivid recollection of an old wandering man at Exmoor; an old fellow of Cromwell's, who wandered loose among the moors, and at times had been seen beating the air with his fists and rushing to and fro to fall and roll screaming upon the ground. He had fought at Naseby, at Marston Moor and Worcester; he had marched with Cromwell, and it would seem the iron of that great lord had burned to his very soul and left him half demented with his heat. They spoke of him as "one touched and turned crazy with religion"; as a madman wrestling with the devil and striving to hold God to his side. Some of them gave him pity and with it alms when he begged, but others I know, who crossed themselves or passed out of their way to avoid him as if beneath those battered boots he concealed a cloven hoof.

That was years ago; this, the very present. And yet it might have been that old fanatic glaring at me from the table and pitching out word upon word in

a kind of drunken frenzy; and I wished it was, and groaned inwardly at the hopelessness of that wish, and this was my father indeed; and he was also Jacob of the Mouth of Fire, I knew how mad that fire was, and also just how dreadfully he made use of it.

He was waiting for me to speak, and I could not find one word to say. He had thrust his arms over the table so that his hands clasped the opposite side; stretching like polished spars, those arms, with great bulging muscles and veins crisscrossed like ropes exceeding blue against the burnt skin. No wonder I looked. The iron of those arms was worth the staring at; the hooking of his long pointed fingers to the table's edge—clamped there, it would seem—with the two thumbs jutting arrogantly free, well worth the thinking on. They showed power of an ugly kind, yet on a saner man I doubt I would have grudged my admiration. But this was my father, and I knew him crazed and turned my head away in horror of how frantically he might abuse that strength.

He saw the gesture and seemed to guess the reason, for he drew them sharply in. "Well?" he demanded. "Well?"

And I echoed him, "Well?" And then cried: "What is there for me to say? You do these things; they seem good to you; worth doing—doing in the name of God! God—" And I stopped, confused and stammering.

He said impatiently: "What better name? Can you tell me that?"

"Why, to work in your own; there would be more honor to leave God out!" I had spoken with little thought, and I almost repented when I saw the effect my words had. He was on his feet with a scream, like a great sea-bird, with arms above his head and fingers spread like talons and stiffened as if dead. There was a snarl on him like a wolf, his gums all a-gape, and the lower lip flopping like a pocket. From his attitude I thought he was about to fly straight at my throat; and I remembered how those fingers had clutched like hooks to the table, and my own instinctively curled inward and clenched there.

But he made no such movement. He only let out a great shriek.

"I am of Christ!" he screamed. "Of Christ, and in mocking me you mock the Most High! To me! To me, I tell you the vision of God has appeared, the vision of His Spirit on the water. And as it moves so I move; and as it strikes so I strike; and as it is still so am I still. Others can serve in their way; what of that? Am I not a servant, also? Is not the sea a part of God's abode even as the land? Laugh! Laugh! Laugh you may until your tongue is cracked in your throat; let all laugh who will! But I strike my sword, and I chant my prayer; I, Jacob with the Mouth of Fire; I, Jacob priest of God!"

I don't know how long he continued in this crazy way; I don't know how it was I could listen to all the mad stream of words which poured from his lips. There was a touch of grandeur with it all. A wild mingling of words which rushed and swept from end

to end of that small room; storming out like a great wind, dying down like the rumble of distant thunder. There was a strange beauty, also. The beauty of a wanton dreamer, pouring out his wistful soul like some singing brook flowing solitary beneath a silver moon. There was all that in his voice. There was all that let loose within that crazed brain yet so touched with magic that my heart could weep to think how much had been lost when the split came. He even stirred a faint pity within me. He was my father, remember. Once, I supposed him hot with youth, thrusting forward into the very heart of adventure. A ragged, eager boy straining from some battered ship toward dimly sighted land men called Darien; while its distant beauty set his heart on fire and stung his glowing eyes. So now he strained in this mad fashion to the God he had created from his own distorted mind. To the God he was so certain would call him blessed and answer the beseechings of those blood-stained hands.

I wanted him to stop his ranting; I wanted him to pitch on to something else. So when he suddenly ceased a second and stood trembling, the sweat trickling down his cheeks, his breath coming and going in great gasps, I hurriedly took the opportunity and asked:

“How do you manage with your men?”

His mood seemed to change instantly; the fever died away, and the old arrogant swagger crept again into his harsh voice.

“They are but dogs, Peter; but, like dogs, they fight well. I stuff their bellies; I stuff their pockets

also. They give me good service; I keep them to my heels, and if they snarl 't is but once, no more!"

I persisted, "Yes, but do you teach them your faith—your ideas?"

He shot a suspicious look my way, and then turned to fussing again with his pipe.

"They'd not care." He spoke bitterly as if the matter lay close to his heart. "They'd not care. There's no softening of their bowels to the Lord; they're weak, children of sin." He seemed resentful at my questioning and I still curious.

"What do they think, then?"

He said, "I'm not for questioning." He went on, "I want them for my work." He let out a great cloud of smoke and muttered slowly: "Mockers, Peter, mockers; that's their kind. So are you, but my son and therefore not so sharp. Eh, Peter? Not too sharp, for I am old; I need you yet and with my age creeping on and on. They watch me, and I them; for I know their cunning. They want fun; that's what this life is to them, fun! Not God. But I use them to shape my ends, to work out my salvation, to heap my offerings. So I keep my mouth shut and clip them to my side; yet not by words, Peter. I've failed there, but by bloody dealings and sharp doings."

I asked, "You tried once, then?"

He nodded thoughtfully. "Once, when I was afire with Wesley, when I saw his face dodging through my sleep and waking me; when I heard his voice singing in the wind; 'Repent, Repent. . . .' Twelve years back. And I was hot with his fire and hot with

fear. They stoned me out of Broquerie Sound; they lashed me to the figurehead of Monson's ship. I served him then, until my body swelled with water and the salt blocked my nostrils. I got away; I got away! And urged some idle drunken dogs to stir their limbs and take a lazy ship right out of Jamestown Harbor. I wanted Monson, Peter; my God, I wanted him! And when I got him I locked the sides of our two ships. I had his broken body slung at that same figurehead which carried me and set it drifting back to Broquerie Sound for all his louts to feast their panic eyes upon. So much for my tongue, Peter. I keep it tight between my teeth; or when it bursts its bonds, I can hold them. Still, the trick is mine as yet. And there is Death!"

I cried out, "Now, who is this Death?"

"Who is he? I never question. I crack the whip; he follows; what else matters? A smooth creature, with cunning in his smoothness that men dislike; and yet I deem him better than Pascal."

I cried out furiously, "A man who kills—"

"Tush, boy! Why harp on his manners?" He lurched himself from his seat with a grunt and stood fastening his pistols more securely into his sash. "Pascal thinks them pretty; a certain neatness in his touch. You'll know it soon. A merry dog; few men can match his laugh—"

5

One other curious thing deserves the mentioning, and it was this. After my father's impassioned outburst he seemed to sink into a state of morose silence,

hardly speaking at all, having no wish to leave the roundhouse even except to give orders. Smoking hour after hour, or poring over the Bible; following each line with his finger and whispering the words. Never again did he speak with such madness.

He was a man of much silence, and much passion; I was to know that. There were times when he would let out amazing things in his life and amazing thoughts, which I think must have fairly battered that poor brain of his until I used to marvel at his control; but such occasions were few and far between. I learned of him, from my own observation. I also learned much from Pascal.

The brig was small, and the three of us slept in the roundhouse, so that in the end I always seemed to be listening to the clatter of Pascal; and although there were times when I could have gladly stopped my ears to get some rest from his pattering tongue, yet he told me far more of what I was to expect now I was joined fairly in with them all. I discovered he had known my father for years. Had sailed with him under the redoubtable Monson, and had been the one who tied the cords about that poor wretch's body when they had hung him out upon the figurehead. He had not seen my father's torture; he was not, in fact, on the ship at all during that voyage, a matter he airily explained in his own light way.

"'Pon wig," said Pascal, "I had business of a daintier kind. A pretty wench, curved like a flower but with the temper of a vixen. Passion of my heart,

what sweetness was hers! So Monson sailed without me, and I put buds in her hair and kisses on her mouth. But plague me, what a hussy! She had a maid, and when my lady went to mass we comforted each other. Tut, tut, what a scold! So I bade adieu as any gentleman would. She'd put me in a plaguy way, and I with empty pockets and a good league from any port. So I took her purse and took her horse; why not? 'T would teach her prettier manners. . . . Then I met our gallant Jacob at Jamestown, and went with him. A hot man, a burning heart, yet cold to women! Now, I ask you, is not that madness?"

That was the worst of Pascal: he would skip off to tell about himself, and I was impatient to learn of others' matters. I said hurriedly:

"That's nothing to do with me; but tell me one thing: has my father always been like this?"

He stared at me with round-eyed perplexity. "Has he not told you?"

"Of course, of course. But how great is the change?"

He looked bored, yet waved plump brown hands with a knowing air. "Tut, tut, the wind may be loud or soft, but 't is the same wind." He jabbed at his teeth with a toothpick which he used noisily and then burst out:

"A most awkward man; given the chance he will talk by the hour about the soul of Abraham, your soul, repentance and death. Plaguy tedious chatter to a man of my cult! And yet a fellow of much

resource; a bold heart, none better; but of so much melancholy. Why, I have known a gayer priest, a pretty hand at cards, and an eye for a gown, a palate for good wine—a most refined companion! But this Jacob—I love him in fighting, but at the table he sinks my bowels in a most infernal desolation.” He took snuff in a very dejected manner and offered the box to me, and when I refused squeaked imploringly: “’Fore God, has Wesley suckled you as well? Why ’t is a very churchyard!” He was staring with such alarm that I hurriedly told him I simply did n’t care for it, which seemed to dismay him all the more until I capped it with the remark that I could play cards, which was true enough. This pleased him, for he instantly clapped me on the back and swore I was his dearest lad and he would “teach me a pretty trick as was ever known.” “That rascal of a priest taught it me,” he squeaked delightedly. “A naughty rogue, an impish dog. Now I, for my part, have a liking for priests; there is a niceness in their teaching; but this Wesley—a more vexatious man I’ve never heard of. No spark to him, no flare. See how it has dulled your father in all but his fists? But Catholics——” He stopped suddenly and looked furtively round; we were alone in the roundhouse finishing supper, my father on the poop. Pascal leaned to me wagging one finger close to my face. “Touching on Catholics, mount a guard to your throat ere you speak the word out to Jacob an he slit it for you! Son or no son, I know his temper. It carries its own strangeness not worth the touching on. There was a man once who teased him

with it, being stuffed with good Madeira. A foolish fellow, a waste of good wine; mark you your father's hands? A pretty quality lies there, and once about the poor fool's neck they pressed in as a band, and squeezed it like an orange, and dropped him overboard as with the skin. 'Pon wig, I see it now; such skill, such swiftness! A marvelous touch; I'd have no better beside me for a risk." He fell to wiping his hands on an embroidered handkerchief and seemed absorbed in the contemplation of each finger, and the lace itself which he constantly pressed to his nose, murmuring at intervals, half to himself, half to me:

"A dainty thing, this lace? From Seville, I'll be certain: such perfume, such memory. I took it from a Spanish lady on a ship we boarded. A pretty wench, as roguish a foot as I had ever seen, but spitting all the while like a naughty cat; she scratched me, the puss. A pity, she should have known better." He sighed and shook his head, and drawled: "This kerchief, though: its very softness soothes."

Then suddenly he looked up sharply and asked in a piping voice, "How is it Jacob has this whim with papists?"

There was something startling in his sharpness. I remembered my father and his saying of the cunning of Pascal, and I realized I was already beginning to learn the man for myself, and knew one thing with such suddenness that it left me for the moment tongue-tied—his curiosity.

Yet I answered him as well I could. "How should

I know? I have known him only a few weeks, and you, how long have you known him?"

He pursed his lips into a round O and nodded knowingly. "So, so. Why I have known him many seasons, many; and shall do—" He paused and fell to drumming the table, humming the while; then rose and hugged my shoulders with the cry: "We shall be merry, you and I! We will crack dice together, and I will teach you to take snuff and make lullabies for dainty ears. Passion of my heart, there is no sweeter solace when the sword is idle. But in this life, as you will see, we have a trick which keeps it moving!"

CHAPTER IV

I

WE fell in with *The Five Wounds* that very next evening. And if there are a few things in my life I shall never forget, that was one of them: the beauty of that twilight and my first sight of the ship. There was a loveliness abroad then which seemed to hurt, a quiet I do not think a layman can understand, unless he has seen the sea in tumult and then in peace. Now it stretched without a ripple blue as a kingfisher's wings, so clear you could nearly follow its depth. Right behind, as if a thin silver ribbon had been drawn with us, lay the mark of the brig; right in front, gently chiding at her cable, lay the great ship. She was painted white, and in the distance, faintly hidden by the falling twilight, she looked a white ghost standing erect against the shot red and gold of the summer sky. Then as I watched, the last ray of the dying sun struck her full upon her sails and dyed them crimson and flooded her about with tawny lights and set her resting on a golden pool, moveless, in her own quiet world. I heard my father come over to me as I leaned against the rails and whisper:

“What did I tell you? Is she not beautiful? Hath she not a grace of her own? Could woman do better? Watch her now! Now, as the sun glimmers, see

her redden, see her blush; mark how she pales with the passing light! Look, look!"

He did not need to bid me look. Had I been blind, I think, I must have felt her loveliness. And as I watched the great lantern at her stern shone out, and I saw it was like an emerald, the great gleam of light splashing the water a vivid green. Then the flare of the dying sun passed from her; she was the ghost ship again. Resting on her own shadow with a meekness which made you marvel, until you saw her vast masts and great spreading sails and knew her pride and just how terrible that pride could be. And if I envied any one when once I trod her decks, it was the master hand that modeled her, the dead eyes that must have watched her first leave the ropes and bend her loveliness to the eager rushing sea. Eight years she was known to me. Nights I have lain upon her decks and watched her pale masts stretch like fingers to the stars, and heard the sighing water make music at her sides as she glided on her mild way. I have known her rush to the billow top and swoop like a great bird down to the sea's trough, and with her sails stretched like vast nets beat her joyous way through maddened seas. And days or nights, at anchor in the bay, I had gone in a boat simply to stare at her great figurehead. Simply to dream beneath that placid woman's face, and wonder how much mystery lay beneath the carving. So gentle a thing I had not seen before. So sweet the lips, so mild the brows; while drawn about them was a bright blue coif which fell beneath the folded hands; and all around were

carved great crimson roses bursting their blooms right down the bows. It seemed so mad that such beauty should know such bloodiness, that such vile acts should happen beneath so pure a name. And yet—who knew what hidden spirit lurked within her walls? What memory—what secret held her still? For I have known myself in later days, flushed with the heat of bloody fighting and infamous shame, stoop suddenly to touch her decks and whisper: “Thou and I! Thou and I. . . .” And feel her strain like a live thing and strive to get the closer in.

2

Did I know then that such a feeling would be mine in the days to come? I cannot say. But one thing I did know; one knowledge was mine even as I stared through the rising mist. I could never leave her. Her very beauty seemed to soften the old pain of what I was, and what I had come to, and was inevitably lost to me. Seemed to drop away then and there and leave me only as if drunken with a great longing to see her running before the wind, her great sails bursting with pride for her adventure. To join in her triumph as, like a woman eager to show her loveliness to others of her kind, she would flaunt her wanton way insolent past their broken sides.

The change! The change! Was it even then? Blinding me to anything approaching reason, but dazzling me with a new and most wonderful enchantment. Was it extraordinary? I do not know. A bad strain somewhere perhaps. A restless wandering

seed lain dormant all the years now bursting out into lusty growth? It does not matter. I only know such a thrill was mine that evening as I had not felt before when my father made me known to the whole shipful.

I see them now, crowding round the poop, hanging to the ratlines, looking me up and down as if I had been some strange animal, muttering one with the other, letting out some fierce questions, grunting sullen consent to my father's short words. They stood there, half naked some, others in huge checked shirts and cotton drawers, some scorched like copper, others again with livid tattoo marks about their bodies until in that dim light they looked like men, all veins, fantastic shapes moving in some unreal fantastic world. The peace of that night. The peace of that still, still sea. The gently rocking ship and all these gaping faces, all these staring eyes as they and I learned of each other. I knew them then as part-adventurers of mine, souls of one accord, joint sharers of a graceless blackguard life; holding a bond that was not mine or theirs to break. I knew my father's meaning then, 'no free man'; neither was I. One life with them.

3

But of them all there were only three who counted in my life, and as it turned out the most important was Laughing Death. I never saw him on the brig, but he was the first I met the cold morning after our arrival on the frigate. At the break of the poop I came upon a man who squatted there, his back to me, and

played a game on clumsy squares, chalked upon the deck, with great red and green chessmen; neither did he turn at the sound of my footsteps, but sat like some graven image staring at the colored pieces. Every now and again, with a swiftness which was remarkable, he would thrust one long hand and move some piece, only to fall again into this strange quiet.

I stood and stared. I was acutely alive to the deadly stillness of the ship, the sea, this man. A sinister atmosphere which turned me suddenly very cold; a quiet which reminded me too vividly of that night in the fog, when the silence seemed like a live thing closing in, and forced me to listen—and I knew then I was still listening for the same thing, laughter.

But there came no sound, no movement. Only quite suddenly the long arm stretched slightly to one side, and I was watching him chalk there, "Green to mate in two moves: can you play, young master?"

He was staring at me. Softly—as if on a pivot he had swung round and was looking inquiringly and smiling up straight at my face. Rocking a little as he sat, huddling his knees right up close to him so that they framed his head, which was twisted back a little to fix mine the better. Of course he was Death. It was stamped on his face; of course he could laugh—soundless now, yet fixed to his lips. There was an ageless look on that face; I cannot describe it better than by saying cities, plains, mountains, and seas seemed graven there, as if from his birth he had fretted against swaddling-clothes and with the first chance loped like a wolf, nose pricked for some scent. Hunted

his way from plain to plain, from sea to sea, restless with desire to travel and follow and kill and laugh. It was a curiously smooth face, but in features curiously uneven. One eyebrow that shot into a peak seemed to hitch up that side of it altogether, the other drooping right down to the lid, seeming in turn to push down that cheek. It was on that side, the left, that the scar ran and added the final grotesque look of horror to the mocking face. Right from the temple it cut a deep furrow to the center of his chin. Piercing the corner of his eye and lip into the shape of a sprawling star; sunk so deep into the flesh that from a distance it might have been a fresh jagged wound and still running. I do not know which shocked me the most, that blatant, frightful scar, or the thin crimson lips, curved Pantaloon-like to one perpetual grin, holding sneering laughter that you felt must still be there long after the death-rattle had passed.

I wanted to pass on and leave him; I could not move. I wanted to get away and try to forget the repulsion of that face; I could not even turn my head. With a sudden deft movement he shot out his foot and rubbed his first question from the deck, to reach with chalk again and scrawl there, "Greeting to you, young master; know you the knight's play of Salvio?"

I stammered stupidly: "Chess? You play chess?"

The right eyebrow seemed to lift all the more; he rubbed again in the same quick manner and wrote:

"What else? It sharpens my wits; I sharpen my knife. I learn to take, to leave; to play, to strike."

I cried sharply: "Why don't you speak? Are you dumb? Having a game?"

He rose swiftly to his feet, and I know I was astonished to see how long and thin he seemed for a man so tightly huddled together when sitting. He did n't say a word, but he opened his mouth to point down it with one long finger; and as he did so, I remembered how during my fever I had been continually haunted by a colossal mouth; haunted, and now surely staring right into its very depth; and knowing again that nightmare feeling of horror. There was no tongue. And as I stood still, sickened by such hideousness, he nudged me and pointed to further chalking on the deck, "Gone, young master; but I can laugh!"

4

It was the quality of his brain which all along baffled. The grim thought that every action, every movement practically, came from his brain, not just from mood or temper, as with Pascal and the rest. It was this realization which set me very cold, and in the end made me think before I answered or questioned him, and made me watch, as a cat a mouse, and as I knew he so watched me. Hatred between men is common enough, and if the one will smart his fellow, hot words or fists will fight it out. Now I never even avoided Death; I do not know that I either liked or disliked him; it was a match between our cunning all the while. A sullen resentment of the other's wits. A watching game, girt about with secrecy and continual doubt.

When we played chess it was part of it. Night after night we would sit and stare at the board, if in the cabin; at the chalked squares, if on the deck by lantern-light. Sit and brood and move a piece here or there, and win or lose as the case might be silently. No word; hardly a movement but the soft click if one figure touched the other. He was the master, not I! But I would learn a trick from him and think, "I'll try that next and catch him with it from another quarter!" And I'd wait, and figure for the opening, and lean back and watch with deepest satisfaction, only to see those long fingers flash like talons before my eyes and take and move and chalk on the table "Check" and leave me staring.

There were no hands like his; I am sure of that. Thin and bony like the man himself. Perfectly straight, having no bend whatsoever to the fingers, which seemed slightly flattened and unusually long. Wonderfully certain, those fingers! Dropping to their object with no hesitation but with a certainty which was positively staggering. So to close upon some piece and move it swiftly here—there; so to close upon some poor wretch's throat, and press the two thumbs in each, well to the vital spots, and the thing was done; in both cases it was the master mind. To Pascal those hands meant work carried out with a perfection that was the purest art. I saw them as instruments of despair and horror; for there was no such thing as Chance, when they set about their business. And yet they formed beauty of a kind. Beneath those selfsame fingers, which could so easily squeeze a neck, he shaped

the chessmen. From ivory dyed red and green, he carved designs so perfect in their delicacy and shape that any craftsman of Spain or Italy might take pride in. Four or five inches each in height they stood, and not one piece but carried out some grotesque idea from that grotesque imagination. Each castle a ship—a galleon with bursting sails, a frigate slender and graceful; each pawn, fantastic, faceless—the buffoon at work. While king, queen, bishop, knight, when finished, were to stand bearing resemblance to some person known to him, either as a great fighter or great enemy. The splendid Morgan in a plumed hat, Cortez bearing his banner against him as red knight; there was a bishop I did not know, but of so vile a countenance I questioned Death, only to see his scar blaze out like fire as he caught the figure up and spat his fury right on the cold carved lips, thrusting at his own throat the while, which told me clearly enough what manner of man had stripped his tongue out.

I remember the day I asked him that. We had anchored in a vacant cove, fetching water and landing the same time to lay out and divide stuffs taken from a Spanish merchantman we had a short while back made wreckage of. Then three men deserted; stole as much as they could, after killing the watchman and cut away through the forest. No one cared much, for we despatched Death to fetch them, or rather their theft—the men were his matter—and sat about and waited, vexing only over the delay. On the fourth day he returned, carrying the one man's head, driving in front the other two, each burdened with the treasure.

He had gone with no weapon but his dagger. They were fully armed, pistols and cutlass. Yet they returned, a little dazed and very white, as if they were dead men propelled by some unknown power. What Death had done either to them or their dead comrade was never known; within an hour they were strung upon a palm-tree face to face, so that in the wind their feet kicked together.

Then once more on board he turned to the chessmen. Fondling and crooning over them; holding each one this way and that the better to see its beauty, uttering little noises of content, little sighs, little chuckles. Then squatting back in a kind of rapture to stare on them all set on their squares, as some child might glory over a doll. It was my turn to take the watch, to relieve Pascal, and it was then as I paused at the break of the poop to put the question about the bishop and received his passionate answer that a seaman passed with the lead. Some movement of the ship, I suppose, set him reeling, and his foot shot out and sent one of the pieces overboard. There came a noise from Death which made the man—and he was big and tremendously bearded—turn white and fumble at his belt, but he had no time. Death had him round the waist and up above his head and over the rails with a crash to the sea which sent the following gulls screaming for miles. He was after the man in an instant, in the water as soon as he, and diving low and right beneath him and up again and swinging on a rope, the figure in his mouth, before the man had gone down the second time. We were racing now before the wind, and there was no thought of pick-

ing the poor wretch up; but I remember that Pascal, his face red and his eyes bulging with rage, came stamping up to Death, now gloating over the saved piece, and shook his two fists in the other's face and screamed aloud: "'Pon wig, this is too much! Keep your toys off the poop and your hand off my men, you slit-tongued, white-face, red-fingered devil's son!"

I saw the scar on Death's face go crimson and the star at his mouth blaze like a newly cut wound; but I could get in no word or sign to Pascal. He was in one of his hysterical mad fits, his ruffles flying like foam at his waving hands and swelling throat, his feet keeping time with his words.

"Toys!" he shrieked out. "Toys, and one of my best men to drown for 'em! 'Pon wig, it's insufferable, monstrous. Keep off my deck; stay with your dolls," he screeched like a bird. "Dolls, dolls, dolls!"

Then Death jumped at him, and I got between somehow. I suppose there was a scuffle. I've forgotten; but I do remember snarling as I wrestled with them and with my own breath.

"None of that now, Death! Pascal, that's my arm; get away from it. Damn you two, have n't you enough killing on hand? Get below, Pascal; I'm in charge now." Then hissing very near to him: "Devil take you, man, do you want to go as meat to the fishes? Have n't you any sense? Get below, I say."

And I have a lively recollection of Pascal, more the turkey-cock than ever, bounding off the poop in a whirlwind of foreign oaths and exclamations, while

Death, suddenly seeing all his chessmen on their sides, set about in a fury of eagerness to put them straight.

5

That was so like Pascal. A man all moods and whims and irritations, whose forethought would suddenly leave him and set him in a twitter of such impatient storming that he was no better than an impetuous woman. On the whole, though, he was just Pascal Aurilly Nicolas Sainte-Jeanne de Tavenny, a mincing, twittering little man, his manners more those of a dancing-master than a sailor, his soul—I cannot think he had one but rather the nose of a dog; sensing for a petticoat at every corner and tripping off all alert to catch up with it.

He airily admitted no knowledge or remembrance even of any parents. "'Pon wig," he said brightly, "neither birthplace or nationality can I claim. What matter? Such ignorance hath a mystery of its own, and besides I shudder to think what an unpleasantness might have been mine had I known my sire and my dam. As it is, he who would be a gentleman is known for such; and with such a name as mine, such a flare to my carriage, I bask in contentment."

I am sure he did. But I would rather have had Laughing Death a thousand times over than Pascal with his devilish refinement, his sensual delight in either killing or kissing, for I verily believe the two were one and the same to him. I remember how I caught him once in Spanish Town with a very bold, amorous lady,

heaping out every kiss and blandishment he could. Curled at her feet, holding her silks while she made skit-tish attempts to work her embroidery, and all the while singing with witchery, now into her ear, now close to her mouth. I can remember the tune and see the two of them, the lady all black curls and blushes, with pretty dark eyes and a mouth which laughed continually; Pascal, pointed and picked to the very buckles on his shoes, which gleamed like diamonds. The silks all spread about his fingers, his lips more scarlet, his gestures more fantastic, singing and swaying:

“As I walked out one sunny morn to view the meadow’s
 mound
 I spied a pretty primrose lass come tripping o’er the
 ground,”

Singing:

“Blow, ye winds in the morning. Blow, ye winds, Hi,
 Ho!
 Brush away the morning dew. Blow ye winds, Hi!
 Ho!”

So gallant and gay and devilish they looked in the sun there, with his crimson coat and great glossy wig, with her silks and laces and nodding ribboned head!

And I can hear the same tune sung to other ears. Where the sand was hot and flat and hard—most of us squatting around, idle, dozing, sleeping some; taking certainly no interest in the singing Pascal, who stood with a small gold basin at his feet, washing his hands and drying them on a lace handkerchief, humming gaily all the while. And near to him, running in circles,

was a man. A thin, naked fellow, making no sound, but his body wriggling most frightfully, his hands clasped round his head; and even when he fell in a heap and wriggled all the more, we took no notice. Neither did Pascal, excepting perhaps to sing the louder, as he always did when he was pleased or amused either from love or as now from vexation, and he had just cut the man's tongue out. A delicate operation requiring as much nicety as when he had wooed the lady with that same song on the balcony at Spanish Town.

6

And there was Jamie. Three-Pint Jamie all drink and melancholy, all bones and dreaming. A first glance, and he seemed no more than points and corners, hunching shoulders to his ears; knees and elbows sticking out like the rowlocks of a boat. A second, and there was a watery eye with a nervous lid, a wistful mouth, a voice which astonished when you recognized its West-Country drawl. No man could drink as Jamie; and when half drunk his fighting was a marvelous reckless thing. And when full drunk he was as useless as a dead man. Sober, there seemed no heart in him; and I have turned my face away rather than meet the desolation of his face, the black despondency so painfully written there.

The first year I knew him least of them all; chance had it we never met hardly at all for long, and then he kept a rigid back, or such a face I could not bring myself to speak; and when I did his mood closed my

own tongue. Then, later, a sudden friendship thickened between us.

I had come down from my watch, all chafed with the March cold, but glowing from the freshness of the sea and feeling most splendidly pricked out with zeal of living, and there was Jamie, his meal untouched, bending over some bit of paper. I could not bear his gloominess and for the once let myself go with him and clapped him on the back and cried:

“Why, man, you should be on deck, not pining here! What is it? A love-letter? What, Jamie!” And laughed at him. Then stopped, for his whole face changed to one of such passion and fury he let out with a tigerish snarl:

“Keep a loose tongue for those like Pascal! Is there naught else but such talk?”

Somehow despite his moods one did not quarrel with Jamie. I took my seat and started on some soup but something moved me to apologize. He stared sullenly and said:

“There’s age between you and me, not of very long years but a soul’s age. You should trim your tongue remembering it; this—” and he touched the paper—“keeps me from loneliness; women could not help me there.”

I put my hand to the wine and smiled back at him as I poured it into my own glass. “There’s this, Jamie; it has a friendly touch”; and I drank to him, still smiling. “Salute!”

He shook his head. “When I read this, I’m sober. When I am drunk I can forget. For there is a sting

to the words which my poor fool head cannot at times bear up against."

I asked, "What do you read?"

He shrugged his shoulder. "Well, take it. To-night I shall be full again and so forget you saw this folly."

It was a page torn from a book he passed. Ill printed, stained and cracked. A poem of sorts, the first verse gone, but I could read the second well enough:

White Peace the beautiful'st of things
Seems here her everlasting rest
To fix, and spread her downy wings
Over her nest.

I looked at Jamie. His head was buried in his arms, and they all sprawling on the table so that all the crockery was huddled together. I looked down at the paper again; the rest I could hardly make out. Words here and there were torn or too crumpled to make understanding of. Then suddenly a line thrust out at me in bold letters clearly defined:

The lyric lark, with all beside
Of nature's feathered quire . . .

I did n't want to read any more. That was enough. "The lyric lark . . ." I was smelling cowslips in a great green meadow; I was catching butterflies which trembled yellow and red and white from flower to flower; I was watching one little lark lift from his nest and so in singing rapture voice to the heavens a song of thankfulness.

And I was back in the cabin with the smell of sea through the window and wine on the table; I was staring at my hands. Rough, strong, merciless; which once had gathered buttercups and held them lightly so they should not die, which only three days back had won such plaudits from Pascal, for their swift action, their bold defense, their sure turn—with the sword.

I tried to keep the dream; I whispered again, "The lyric lark . . ." It would not stay. I felt a tug at my sleeve, and Jamie was muttering:

"Know you what that means? 'Over the nest . . .' That's England; it's peace there!"

I whispered more loudly, "I have heard such a lark on Exmoor."

He was holding both sleeves now, his face pressed close to mine. "Exmoor. You know it?"

I said, "I lived there—years past."

He cried thickly: "So did I. So did I!" He went on, "Know you the trout-stream where the Oare divides?"

I cried, "I do! I do!"

He said in the same thick voice, "There was a stag once . . ."

In an instant the dream held me again, and I was crying breathless and eager: "I know him! A friend of mine. Marked him as a red shadow pricking through the moonlight, his great head reared in lordly contempt! Nights have I watched him, silent with his herd beneath the moon, and lain there still watching, until the dawn breaks on Dunkerry Beacon and all the heather shows bending silver with the dew."

With a clatter of an overturned chair, he was on his feet clapping, his hands to his ears. "Let hell close down your mouth, or let me be deaf, rather than listen!" He flung his arms over his head, crying with intense bitterness: "Christ, Christ! What I have lost!"

He came from a hamlet on the borders of Devon and Somersetshire, Plover's Cove. His father had been sexton to the church there, and his father before him and before that. The names, he told me, were carved in stone at the porch; his was to have been there . . . had he stayed.

Of those days and the memory he kept of them, given the mind and being sober, he would talk wistfully yet with sudden eager flashes which generally ended in most heavy drinking. But of the tragic after-days he kept a silence, and the little I gleaned was pitiful enough. He had been taken by the press-gang when drunk; even in those days he knew such manners. He had mutinied in savage desperation with others, only to see three yard-armed and himself, with the rest, go in irons to the Carolinas. How he got away no one knew. Some man once told me, though, how years back, when serving with Munson, they picked him up on some forsaken shore, jabbering like an idiot, with broken skin stretched from bone to bone, rushing from them on sight, and, when they caught him, shouting he was Cain and God was hunting him. They clapped him on the back for a joke and called him "brother" and poured Jamaica rum into his cracked lips, and when he could stand stuck pistols in his belt and pricked a skull

upon his shoulder. And made him drink again and set him singing drunkenly on some Somerset song.

So he continued. A good sailor, now second mate; a good shot; he'd drill the men at gun practice a sight better than Pascal. And all the time he was hardly ever sober, seldom fully drunk, but nearly always half-way between the two, and then at his work there was no man to touch him. Best for him and for me that state. For I began to loathe his soberness. Hate his maudlin remembrances, hate this man who was a sexton beneath his gaudy coat, his sodden manners. He was the one link between my life here and those old dead days, and I would forget. And yet there have been times when I would long for him sober that I might sit and talk of that great stag and see, in vision again, Dunkerry Beacon paint the black night sky.

It is in case there should be a misconception of my life, once I was joined in with my father, that I have so fully detailed these three men. They were my comrades. I ate with them, fought, laughed, and played with them; and as the days passed and the change spread within me so did I become more and more indifferent to their manners, less and less inclined to show distate at their brutish ways. The span which surely must have stretched between us was gradually fading into mere nothingness. In all respects I was one with them, except in respect of women. There Pascal found me dull; neither thought then that the grimmest shadow ever known between us would be cast by a woman.

7

I was to learn one other thing in the course of the next few weeks, and this last taught me the full extent of my father's power. Here was the land he made his harborage, the great camp he ruled at Isola Sound.

It lay well down south of La Plata, a flat run of land with jagged little curves and breaks and sudden islets and then unexpectedly a very cool and placid bay formed by two great arms of rock thrusting out to sea. From its position—it lay well out of the track of most ships—it was a sure enough refuge alone; but it had a secret which not only added to its security but made my father's authority something almost as invulnerable as those two great cliffs themselves.

Right from the coast edge, well beyond the mouth of the bay, lay a great belt of sand-banks and shallow water. Had there been more traffic it would have been an easy graveyard for some poor fool uneasy in his bearings. As it was, those who knew kept well away; and thus it was, my father picked upon this shore for his vast settlement. And not without reason. He held the secret of a safe way right through those shoals, and no man knew it and no man guessed, for he took the wheel himself when the time came. I used to think if they hated him, as indeed I knew they did, they must have hated him all the more each time he ran them sure and certain to that mild harbor. For here was a thing which bound them to him more positively than any bond or oath. Here was their very life dependent upon his leadership. Without him they were mere

buccaneers, ceaselessly dodging king's ships, running a risk as thin and fine as any sword-blade, and all the while having no safety but what they might find on the sea.

It was not until I knew this that I ceased to wonder at their obedience. For the more I knew my father, the more I learned how strange and cold a man he was, how entirely different from their idea of leadership. He ruled the ship with man-o'-war discipline, and the settlement as if it were some ancient kingdom and he its king. He watched them, too; not a man made some slip but it was brought to light. Not a man who turned trickster had the chance ever to try it again. With my father there was no second time.

Isola Sound! I have but to close my eyes and hear again the low, sullen roar of breaking surf, to see the broken remains of an ancient city, turned silver beneath the flooding moon. Isola Sound! Twice inhabited and twice left desolate; now a mere camping-ground, now the center for every kind of brutish men, each likely enough with a price to his head, a troop of nameless women forever at their heels fighting like cats, a great herd of cattle, numberless Indians, quiet, but good traders. That was how I knew Isola Sound. Yet there was a strange quiet to the place, a brooding desolate air, telling, I think, of ancient secrets never known, of a people proud in their thought and terrible in war; rearing their temples and their palaces in wonderful beauty before that sea unknown to any ship. Little but dust remained of all their splendor. An image, carved from wood or stone or ivory; found

tangled in the undergrowth, headless upon the sand, yet standing upright; carved into the rock, its painted face hacked and hewed across, its beast-like paws crushed and split apart. A great hall, with a silver pavement and huge black marble pillars. A dead king, torn from his tomb, lying half in, half out, his raiment rotting, his face still concealed in its golden mask, the leering eyeballs of the skull showing like two tiny wounds through its slits. His chamber wantonly stripped of all its trimmings, his city broken down, his triumph brought to dust. Sleeping there. How many years?

And the Spaniards who did this reared a great crucifix right on the shore's edge. A wonderful thing of colored woods and golden petals, showing a face of such beauty that I have seen the roughest of our men catch his breath as he passed and look away. For all his hatred for any papist, my father would not have it touched—neither would he alter the sacred name of the frigate.

So having made it wreckage, they contrived to make it Spanish in their fashion. It was never finished. With the exception of a few huts and houses, they left it a broken, dreary place with cattle straying down the old tessellated streets, beasts content to breed in the broken tombs. So my father found it; how or when I do not know. But because of the trickery of its approach, and the vast herds of oxen, it suited him uncommonly well.

Isola Sound. By day a wanton reckless place of mad riot and madder talk; by night, a city of mourning kings. Dead souls creeping through its ruins, wistful

tragic faces peeping through the trees, their sobbing coming with the wind, dying away on the sea.

So I have thought; so I have fancied, when at nights, sleepless, I have stared at its dead beauty stretching naked beneath the stars, and heard the quiet stir of moving feet as its thousands came back to hold their watch of sorrow.

CHAPTER V

I

ONCE I had known a youth; passable enough in manner, easy with his living, given sometimes to melancholy, sometimes to dreams. Showing a smile which women would have said made his whole face sweet, having a temper which was honest enough but that could flare very red at the bidding. They called him Peter Comfort. So much for youth.

Even so I knew a man, a cold grim fellow, short with his words, short with his moods; having a face of scorn and a heart of bitterness; a man who stalked mankind with a naked sword, who chased romance with feet which left a bloody trail. A dreamer gone to seed, a youth turned old by shocking thoughts; turned drunkard by too strong a wine. They called him Peter the Quick, and Peter the Cock; sometimes, Red Peter! So much for manhood.

This was the one I knew the best. This the one who pushed the other out. This the one whose face I might have known a thousand years, so free from strangeness did it seem. A face showing much flush of sun; hot yellow hair like straw; a straight long mouth well closed, with eyes which held much thoughtfulness. A watching ready look. A show of arrogance and pride; a show of bold adventure and heedless enterprise. A

boyish face beneath the hard set lines ; a face grown old before its time.

Well, it suited the life better than that smooth-faced youth of Bristol days ; it answered to the thrill which lay behind the madness. There was a thrill ; let that be said ! A thrill which led you on and on through reckless days of wild pursuit, through violent deeds and viler thoughts ! That was the thing ! The thrill behind it all.

In that great pillared hall there marched about and came and went all manner and kind of men with all manner and kind of talk. Spreading to the night hours even when the place was set aflame with reeking torches, moved this continual stream, sounded this ceaseless noise of racket and riot. Indians trading this and that, offering their stuffs, their women, all for exchange and barter. Silent bearded men, slipping in to see my father, with talk of some great treasure ship, with careful information of what might be brewing outside ; cutthroats of the worst kind these men ; but long-eared and of good use. There was no quiet to the place, excepting when, from weariness, I have crept out from the heat and noise to hide among the trees. There was a vastness in that forest that spoke of untold mystery ; there was a fear that lingered there ; yet I felt an untold fascination. No sound, no stir. Only unutterable loneliness ; only a great green wall which locked away all sight of sky ; a huge pattern of intermingled branches which never knew the moon.

And here I dreamed. And here the smooth-faced Bristol youth came back for a little while.

2

There was a spinney, as I remember it, not so far from my aunt's cottage in Bristol. A place of pale young trees and peeping primroses, of nesting birds and gathering moss. I had often lingered there. I had cupped my chin and laid my length upon the soft-leafed ground, and let my soul go dreaming among the clouds, and let the wonder of the climbing moon prick music in my heart, and let the passion of the nightingale benumb my throat and daze my straining eyes. I was a dreamer then. I was an eager boy. Mounted with vision I would stroke the stars. I would grow a man and do such marvelous things. So in the peace of that great foreign wood I could forget the fury and the heat, the racket and the wildness. Close my eyes, shut my ears. Smell again the old sweet-scented smell of English earth. Fox-glove, wild thyme, musk-rose, and violets; the scents of English woods and English flowers, the chase of butterflies, and with the setting sun great moths with silver eyes and wings of dusk.

There was a madness in such dreaming; for I was then but a dead man straining back across the void of his dead past, and even in my drunkenness thinking to hear that dear voice crying, "Peter, Peter, it grows late; past supper-time . . ." So sure, that I would start and stare as if I might see her coming in all her gentleness through those giant trees. Could mockery be so vile? A breaking of undergrowth, a shouting of, "Peter! Hey, Peter, I say! Up with your feet!

'T is past the hour, and we are all waiting. 'Why, man, God bless us, rub those sleepy eyes; are you forgetting what a sport there is to-night?'

Forgetting? Anything but that. Forgetting? The boy in the spinney rather than the mad thrill of madder fighting.

3

I was a pirate, that was all. A buccaneer, free-booter, rover, cutthroat. I was a graceless man turned blind by bloody deeds which I thought wonderful. What had I to do with dreams? What had I to do with peaceful towns and quiet glades? Had I no father with a shameful name? Had I no bonds which tied me to his side? Would I go back? Was I so dead to all the simple beauty of those days, so stuffed with beauty of a wilder kind, that I would stay? I could not answer. There was a passion in my heart I could not still; there was a fever in my blood I could not cool. If I had been burnt with fire I could not quench the very night I first set eyes on *The Five Wounds* in all her loveliness, I know I had been set aflame by the mad fury of my first fight.

It was a Spanish ship then we tracked; bursting her sides with treasure for the Escorial from Panama. Three days we searched her out; and on the fourth a great red ship with great red sails drove through the blue morning mist, her banners beating the air like huge gold wings. Her vast masts seeming to scrape the sky, her whole bulk stately with insolence.

So near she was we could see the blue and silver of

her captain's dress and the staring wide-eyed faces of her men; and hear with uttermost distinctness the cry of challenge:

"What ship is that?"

And from Pascal with a flourish of his hat, "*The Five Wounds*—and you?"

And the answering voice with supreme courtesy, "His Holy Majesty of Spain's *Santa Maria*." And then with sudden sharpness, "Of what port?"

From Pascal with a wink to the gunners and a wave to the Spaniard, "Of the sea!"

And the retort even more shrill, "Of what nation?"

Shouted my father, hoarse with sudden wrath, "Of God, vain image worshiper! Of God!" Followed the rip of tearing canvas, and our shot rent her sails; the splintering of wood as our cannon racked her sides.

It was not that which sickened me. Not the merciless slaughter which would follow with such a capture; not that nor worse things. But in that harsh challenge of my father's I felt my sickness. There was no God with us. No godly deed done, thought, or spoken by any man of us; no room for God aboard our ship. But rather sometimes in our wake I think there followed Christ, all weeping at the heaped dead which floated—and sank . . . behind our reddened heels.

It took me some time to realize this madness and get my mind free from any thoughts of hypocrisy or cant. Yet when I had accustomed myself to the crazed workings of that tormented brain, I found with some astonishment I had no room for pity, I only stood, contemptuous. I imagine he knew that outburst on the

brig was the last mention of his religion. He was a lonely man, and I think he shunned me, as I—God forgive me—shunned him. And yet he could move me.

4

In the matter of treasure taken he laid claim to half, and one quarter the men divided among themselves; the remainder Pascal, Jamie, and I shared. Death took nothing; he had no interest in such matters.

It was my father's regular custom to take a great load of plunder (gold or silver bars, jewels, or the like) and leave it at the edge of some small Wesleyan settlement known to him; all his eagerness went to these fresh growing communities. It was but once a year only—at Christmas-time—that he secretly conveyed vast offerings to the headquarters of the mission. Until I joined, he set about such undertaking accompanied by Laughing Death only; later I went with him. For my part I chafed at his foolishness in going himself. After all he was my father; and not so young that he could play at any kind of risk, for despite their worshiping they were ready enough with dogs and guns should they catch any stranger lurking by their lines, those settlers. But his was a stubborn mind; he gave trust to no one, not even me; he did his own business, and no man could move him from it. In the end I kept my mouth shut, and grew accustomed to these silent journeys. Let it be said I hated them; I was too close to my father, I used to think too much . . . of him.

Sometimes we would march two days or more to

reach the place, and I would follow by the hour that tall straight back, brooding: "How far will you lead me yet? To what end? To what end?"

Or break away and get ahead only to hear those steady steps treading the grass behind me, and think again: "You'll rush me down; is that it? I must follow, or be followed—followed."

And yet again at night, when we three squatted around the fire. There would be Death intent on his carving and my father tracing line upon line in his Bible and muttering the words all the while. I would find myself fascinated and staring at that cold proud face. Thinking with a bitterness which almost frightened me: "All this for your God. And when you are gone I still must remain, there is no way out for me. You have seen to that."

Funny I should have such thoughts then; for in the riot of my every-day life I do not remember any such depression. Sudden maudlin reminiscences with Jamie were of small consequence; dreams in the forest of no matter at all; but in this sullen brooding, this sudden resentment, there was a vast difference.

I believe my father knew. True, he kept his silence and I mine, but one night across the firelight I caught him watching me; I saw his wonderful eyes gleaming like twin stars through the haze of smoke while his hands lay idle upon the closed Bible.

Something in his attitude made me ask impatiently, "Must you watch me so?"

And he said harshly, "Have you grown to hate me, boy?"

"No; not hate," I said. "You are my father; I try to remember that."

He smoothed his chin with a reflective finger and thumb. "Children have hated their parents; there is nothing new in it. It is not sudden; it grows; it will grow in you, Peter. I have been watching; I wait for its final burst."

I cried savagely: "What more would you have? You followed me; you trapped me. I am your son; is not that enough?"

He said slowly, "I would ye had loved me, Peter."

I wanted to laugh, but I fancy I groaned. "Ah! You go too far. You should have thought before you came to Bristol."

There was no warmth in his voice. He said deliberately and without any show of feeling, "Love breeds hate; you 'll be loving one day, and then there 'll come the hate for me."

I said with some bitterness: "Love? What 's it to do with me?"

He went on: "Some woman. That 's what women are for; to give love, and to take it."

Odd how he could fling words about so heedlessly. Women. And he could talk of them with as much cold calculation as he would with any adventure we were set upon. Women—he could link my name with them. What had I to do with women? Had he not the heart to see how vast a span divided them from me? How unassailable, how tragic, was the bridge which stretched between us? I thought of the women I had known. My aunt—how she had cringed at the

very sight of my father; my mother—how she had run from him. I thought of the few, the very few, I had met in Bristol, young creatures with merry fresh young ways; they would go by with their hands before their faces could they but see me now; could they but know me and the life I led. Women! Plenty of them. New York, Port Royal, Spanish Town. There were women enough and more ready at the wink of an eye to turn and follow. To follow at the heels of Pascal and his like, to go even with Jamie, who was as loose with his money as with his drink; to run with any man among us and in her turn quarrel with any who might come next. They were always coming—and going—in odd silent ways at Isola Sound. So would any one of them to me for the asking; I had my choice of such. Did he not know how the screw could twist?

5

And yet he could show another side, and I, in turn, could be moved to something verging on compassion. For I remember one night; a night all stars with a gleaming plate of a moon, which turned the distant mountaintops all silver and picked out sudden boulders of rock about the sandy plain until they shone like diamonds. At the very foot of those hills lay the settlement for which we were making; and for once, as we were skirting the edge, Death lost his tracks and brought us right up to the very side of their rude meeting-house. It was the riskiest moment I had ever known. We were in their very midst. Any moment some watcher or a dog might give the alarm. And

there lay only that naked plain between us and safety (of a kind) within the forest.

Death had already drawn his knife and was standing on tiptoe sniffing the air, and I caught my father by his sleeve and whispered:

"Gently, gently. Not a word, but quick with your feet; we must get away from here."

He did n't answer. He made no response whatsoever; and when I looked sharply at his face he might have been star-gazing. He held it upturned, his eyes shut; and as he stood he trembled, and I noticed his lips moved as if in prayer. I signaled to Death to leave the sack and not unpack as we always did; I went very close to my father and shook him and whispered again as loud as I dared:

"Will you dream now? You 'll sleep long enough if you loiter here; make haste while you can."

And he opened his eyes, and stared not at me but straight at the prayer-house and muttered: "Holy ground, holy ground. To your knees, boy; to your knees."

He would have fallen to them had not Death come up behind and caught him and helped me with him, and while we struggled I thrust my mouth to his ears and said as loud as I dared. "Other times for prayer. We must get back to the ship. Kneel there; not here, and be hanged!"

He was whimpering now, whimpering and struggling, stammering out: "I would go to my God! Let me go in; let me go in. I want to be near God; I want to pray with them. I prayed with Wesley; let

me tell them that. Let me pray with them a little! Only a little, a very little."

There were tears streaming down his face now, yet I had no heart to look at them. I was cursing beneath my breath and swearing this should be the last of these expeditions. I was cursing Death, too, for not using more force, when at that instant fresh singing voices rang through the night, and in that clear evening their words came easily to us:

"Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord."

I felt my father stiffen beneath my fingers; his head jerked up again and I could hear the straining of his breath, as with a suddenness which startled me he flung his arms above his head and cried aloud:

"God! So have I cried my soul away. So have I reached from the deep that I might touch the hem of Thy garment. Out of the depths . . . O Lord, O Lord, Thou knowest!"

It was Death who flung out his hand to still that voice, and his action stung me to join with him and drag my father violently away, panic-stricken lest his cry might have been heard above the singing. His resistance as we got him toward the plain, was hardly more than the resistance of a child. He only moaned and beat with his hands at our hands; and whimpered over and over again: "Let me go back. I would kneel with them; I would sing with them. I have repented once; let me repent again. Why be so cruel, boy—so cruel? You need not come. Let me go to them; let me go and pray a little while . . ."

And even across that silent plain, even when we were hidden by the great somber trees of the forest, I fancied I could hear that singing; I could hear the branches humming in tune, and the surge of distant sea rising and falling like a multitude of voices.

“My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning.”

Mocking voices coming through the trees; sighing voices stirring with the leaves, chanting hosts rumbling from the mountains: “More than they that watch for the morning . . .” And I, who knew no morning, how could I know God? How could my father, dragging drearily through the forest, with tears streaming down his cheeks? There was no morning in our life. There was no God. Only the crazed notions of a mad old man. But know I went to his side and put my arm about his shoulders, for surely then our solitude was one and the same thing.

6

There is no use that I can see in lingering over those five years of my life. They were, for the most, all the same; one day like another, one night followed by another, no difference. If it was not swift action, it was deeper thinking; if it was not sleeping, it was waking and plotting; if it was not rioting with dance and drink, it was lounging and idling or possibly throwing the

dice. And then it happened that my world was spun about and I saw in the distance hope—no bigger than a man's hand—for better things.

We were in Spanish Town, my father and I and Pascal with the brig. In the brig and by another name he was known as an honest trader. It was a sharp scheme. We worked our best business in such disguise. This time he had not told what particular game he had afoot, and Pascal and I sulked the two nights we lay in the harbor. There was a wine-shop not very far up the main street; they called it The Dead Hand, not a particularly savory name and not a particularly savory place. It was a drinking and gaming place for the men and captains of ships. For traders and soldiers; for unknown and curious beings who lived on other men's meat and drink; for officers of the governor's house, and for women, too—of a kind.

On the evening I speak of, we were all three there. My father silent and wrapped in his own thoughts, smoking heavily and, I rather fancied, waiting for some one. Myself cleaning my pistols and watching Pascal with some amusement. And Pascal oblivious to my interest, dandling a very pretty woman on his knee. I know she had a very white face and remarkably big eyes, a bold way and a graceless tongue. She seemed intent on plaiting Pascal's wig, and they both had supreme enjoyment from the wine-bottle.

He was chattering now: "'Pon wig, it is but tattle! Where else would my eyes be but on your sweet face? Passion of my heart, you might say—is she fair

or dark or plump or slender—and I am dumb! Dumb, and believe me, pretty, blind to all charms, and wedded only to the syrup of these lips.”

And so lied Pascal with a flourish and a squeak. His mouth all rounded and puffed out in certain expectation of her caress, and becoming, as she did not answer, rather like a plump foolish bird waiting for the worm to be dropped, and getting more and more pettish at its delay.

For in a twinkling she had her chin tilted well in the air; she had a lusty laugh and the room rang with it.

“La, what a vexed naughty face! What would you have? Am I a sugar-plum to sweeten all tastes? No woman so honest as I.” She wagged a finger at him. “No woman. I have a husband—a pretty man, yet with a jealous eye and a warm liver, and a trick maybe to stop a greedy mouth. What say you to husbands, duckling?”

His arm held her all the more comfortably. “Why I love them, my pretty. Mine is a nature which longs to hold sweet intercourse with such; a blade which yearns with true passion to feel out each delicate part of their body. Husband! Nay, but I love you all the more, sweetheart, and sigh that I may behold him.”

She cried with mock dismay: “Fie! Shame on a bloody tongue. Do you truss all men so easily?”

Pascal winked at me and reached for his glass. “’Pon wig, they are but flies; they buzz too near, and I slice their wings. Kiss me, Polly, or I will kiss this husband of yours till his lips be sore.” He stretched a lazy hand. “Pretty face, must I teach you kissing?”

His eyes were half closed and his face very flushed, his look half insolent, half amused. He was so sure of his quarry, and he hated being idle in harbor. She had the advantage as she bent to him, lolling in amorous rapture—and she took it; she possibly knew Pascal.

I saw her hand slip to his pocket, just as her mouth rested on his; and because she was a woman and Pascal—just Pascal—and there was as much show of the gamester with her as with him, I grinned behind my hand and watched the unknowing Pascal sigh beneath her caress. It was easy to see how practised she was. Light as a feather, she was off his knee and out of the room carrying his purse and his handkerchief ere Pascal had wakened out of his passion and was blinking and staring in front of him. My laughter startled him; at first he was peering around, crying: "Pussy, Puss! Where are you hiding, my duckling?" Then he was on his feet pulling at his emptied pocket, shrieking out, "Passion of my heart, a thief, I tell you; a wanton bitch of a thief!"

And a regular howl of mirth shook the room. Each and every man in the room had jumped to the mischief and was holding sides at what they considered a prime joke.

"Picked his pocket!" they cried to each other. "Picked his pocket, the jade!"

"How much did you pay for her kisses?" "'Pon me, but the hussy had a pretty taste of humor"; "Fooled by a whore"; they bawled across to each other. "Blood of my heart, queered by a trollop!"

And all the while Pascal raged with his drawn sword, pricking into dark corners, shrieking and blaspheming, his wig all sticking out in points as she had plaited it, his face like a great red sun, his huge coat flapping. "Out of my way," he screamed. "Out of my way! I'll cut her tongue, the baggage. I'll give her kisses!" He crashed a table to the ground and made for the door, while they all shouted after him:

"Run, my cock; catch her and nest her"; "Trim thy belly if you'd run races." And they started to shout together: "Yoicks, yoicks! Tally-tally-o! After her, after her . . ."

Pascal, always too fat, now very breathless and nearly choking, stumbled and swore across the room to the great door and had it open and was practically out and down the street, when he collided with a man coming in. A man who seemed to push him back into the room and give to him not one inch to pass and had no care or notice for his sword.

Said Pascal, "Out of my way; by God, I'll not be hindered."

Said the stranger—and there was a tone to his voice which made me stare, "There's room for two without jostling, I'm thinking."

I saw Pascal's free arm press the man on his chest and bawl out, "Must I jolt you to hell?"

It seemed extraordinary to me, knowing Pascal, yet it was he, not the stranger, who was pressed back. There was something odd about the man which made me look at him curiously and even wonderingly. He was n't over tall nor yet short; he looked a ragged

sort of mountebank, his face very hairy, with eyes which glinted like blue flame; his dress as ragged as his appearance; and I saw he had wrapped about him a great plaid, and that made me stare all the more.

The noise in the room had died down a bit; the men were drinking again, and talking in whispers and watching these two with some amusement. I saw Pascal's sword-arm go up, and I was about to cross to him when the man drew his sword from his scabbard, and as the blade showed a great laugh went up from the room, and I saw Pascal grin, for it was broken off at the middle. But the man spoke with a grimness which set us all quiet again.

"'T is the point of this I left in the stomach of a redcoat Culloden way. An' I 'm thinking, wee mannie, 't is for you to say if ye 'll swallow the hilt or no!"

I saw Pascal's jaw drop, and I think for once in his life he was nonplussed; and for my own part I was amazed at the dreadful intensity of that ragged man. Pascal was beaten; whether he knew it or not I do not know, but I am pretty sure he had forgotten about the girl and his empty pocket while the point of his sword pricked the floor.

It was my father who suddenly came over and startled us to life again. He pushed Pascal aside and stood towering above the Scotchman, snarling down at him: "Rome for you and yours. Here! What do you here?"

He answered slowly: "I wait; I wait. Until I mend my sword and trail it in the heather again."

My father retorted harshly: "And put your puppet

king upon the throne, and let your gallants take honest women from honest men; and let your priests go smug about the country-side! So you talk! So you'd live! You Jacobites!"

Through that thatch of hair he may have whitened; I could not swear. But there was no tremor, no anger, when he replied; only the same grimness:

"Ould man, ould man, I ken no words wi' boys or the fathers of boys. I'm just thinkin' your God an' mine put up wi' much brawling in Their name. Ken very well I no want to dishonor mine by staining bloody those white hairs of thine."

I saw my father stiffen. He stared the man full in his face and went back to his table, while Pascal, who had been the cause of this, sulked in a corner with a fresh wine-bottle. The Jacobite seemed to disappear as quietly as he had come. One man said, "Devil take me, the fellow needs manners."

And a thin man with a thin voice piped across the room: "Pierce me, they should have had the rope, each one of them. Cumberland the Butcher, they say—prick me but he spread his fingers too wide in his chasing."

A big man, in red and gold, an officer on the staff, drawled lazily: "When you're older, Withers, you'll learn just how much you can teach the Scotch and how much you may learn from them yourself. 'Fore God, what do his manners matter? His skin is tough and his hand steady, a good servant, a rare fighter."

The man Withers chirped again: "Servant? Body o' me, is there another of them?"

The soldier yawned and started to pick his teeth: "A dying man; what boots it? A relation of my Lord John Fortescue Eskdale; a brave man tied to a corpse."

I found myself suddenly stammering: "What name? What name?"

He smiled over at me, for we were friends of a kind, he and I: "Give ye joy for knowing a good quality name! A Jacobite and a papist." He shrugged tremendous shoulders. "What care I? Coffined, it little matters what boot fitted his leg; here's to his name, John Fortescue Eskdale! Good health!" And I drank with him, staring the while at my father, but he was wrapped in his own thought. He never heard, never knew—what I knew.

7

What was he doing here? John Fortescue Eskdale; could there be another of that name? Not possible. Too curious a name—and a Jacobite. And I thought of my aunt speaking in her garden, long ago:

"A reddish man with laughing eyes who went with a limp"; and I thought of her gentle reproach, "Life is made up of partings—and meetings."

Was it? Well, I would make sure of one meeting. We were to sail with the dawn, but they might sail without me for all I cared. I was going to meet John Fortescue Eskdale!

Comes much beauty with a starless night, and when I came again ashore there was a sense of drowsy rest about the place. All the heavens seemed scooped into one vast black bowl which hung motionless and strange

with wonder. With the breeze there came the curious scent of brine and seaweed; of sleepy warm trees and warmer plants; of odd town smells, and somewhere in the air the faintest whiff of incense. I told the man to wait with the boat and went along the crazy planks which did for a jetty and up the silent street to the wine-shop. The main room showed empty; that did not matter. I told myself I would walk the house through until I could find some one who could tell me where he lodged. I went down a passage black as the night itself until I saw a door and caught a glimmer of light. I did not trouble to knock; I pushed it open impatiently and stood for a moment peering in the dim light until I saw it was occupied; then I shut it gently.

There was a man sitting in a great leather chair at the open window, his back toward me; but as I moved I saw him start and turn his head the slightest in my direction. He asked sharply, "Is that you, Douglas?" and coughed suddenly and very violently. "Shut the door, man, can't ye? There's an awful wind."

Then I came across to him and stared at him closely. He was in shabby dress, with a great plaid over his knees, and his hair was gray and his face heavily freckled; but his eyes were extraordinarily bright, even merry, yet set in many lines. And though his mouth showed gentle as a woman, there was an air of mockery at its corners and a stern set to the jaw. I had only to see his hands were marked with red hair, I knew I did not need to wish him walk to look for the limp. I had seen enough, and I was staring him right in the face—John Fortescue Eskdale, after all these years.

It was he who spoke first, and there was a curious charm to his voice: "I ask your pardon, sir; I thought it was my servant; visitors are rare with me. Is there aught I can do for ye?"

I answered slowly: "It was you I came to see. John Fortescue Eskdale; am I not right?"

His finger and thumb pressed his lips together, and I saw his eyes glint.

"Said very rightly; that is how I am called," he replied. "But you have the advantage of me in respect of names."

"You should know me," I told him, and I watched his face very carefully. "Peter Comfort; is that strange to you?"

He was half on his feet, then sinking back to his chair, while the cough held him and his hand went to his side:

"You with that name—you? I could not count the years since I have heard it spoke; and now you tell me—" He stopped and laughed stupidly. "Why, you must pardon me, young sir; life has been ill with me." He stopped again and then cried out harshly: "How come you with that name? God's pity, sir, can you not speak? Who called you so?"

I answered, "My mother." And lest he did not hear, repeated more loudly, "My mother," and never let my eyes for one instant leave his face.

He sat like a man dazed; and the pallor of his face even frightened me. He kept on licking his lips, and I saw he was trembling; and he started to mutter over and over:

“Margaret, Margaret!” and he kept on whispering, “Her son, her son; her dear son Peter!”

And he was on his feet with a suddenness which startled me, crying, while tears ran down his cheeks:

“Peter, Peter! That I should have lived for this day! That I should have set eyes on ye and doubted! Margaret, Margaret! What would she not do now to see ye? What would she not do to see us together?”

I let him babble on; I let him chatter. I never moved to him; I doubt if I saw the glow on his face and the wetness of his eyes. Every bit of me was cold then, ice-cold.

He was looking me up and down with caressing hands on my shoulders. He was crying and laughing together and touching my dress as a woman might and holding my hands as if he could never let me go.

“Such a brave lad, Peter; why—how could I know you? How could I think so little a thing could grow to such a pretty fellow? I would dangle you in my arms, Peter; I would sing songs in your ears to make you smile. Now—why, now you must hold me up, for I am a dying man, Peter, and I need brave songs to ease my weakling spirit. Brave songs as she would sing; as she has sung in her dear gallant way when we poor souls were seared with sorrow.” He let me go and put his hands to his head and whispered brokenly, “I think my heart is split, and I have wondered why I linger so.” He was looking at me again, the dancing in his eyes making a brave show against his twitching lips. “Now I know, my Peter! Now I see. There is a bonny way with God no man knoweth until the

time comes." Then he stopped, and I saw a change on his face, a startled puzzled look in his eyes as he peered at me closely, put his hand out and touched my chin, only to let it drop aimlessly at his side. "Why, Peter, eh, boy, what ails thee? What is it?"

I saw very slowly and distinctly, "Why did you take my mother from me?"

He moved a little back from me, his brows all creased, his mouth a little tight, his manner slightly perplexed yet very gallant.

"Why," he answered simply, "I loved her. Love has a rare way with it, Peter."

I said, "I was her son." I cried aloud, "I was her son."

He said very earnestly: "Is it so harsh ye are with me? Ah, Peter, the time was so short, and you were to have come. Only a little I had her; could you grudge me that?"

I said dully: "Long enough—too long. I needed her; had she stayed there might have been some chance."

He asked, "Chance, for whom?"

"For me," I told him. "For me."

8

For a time there was silence between us; he sat huddled forward on his chair, his head in his hands, looking away into the shadowed garden which lay beyond. I stood staring down at him churning upon my thoughts in most bitter misery. It was very still in the room, very still in the deep dusk beyond. Once

I heard the click of castanets and a woman's laugh; once the cry of a man as if in pain and the shuffle of running feet. But none of these things broke the quiet that lay between us. Then he said suddenly, as if he had been brooding:

"What have you to do with chance, Peter?"

And I answered him, "That has been my life, all chance."

He said, "There was your aunt—"

I whispered back, "Not enough, not enough."

He looked up sharply, and there was a sadness in his eyes. "Well, well, what is this thing that lies between us. Is it jealousy? Is it hate? Is it ne'er to be love? Your mother was wishful for that. So, so. Will ye be speaking all that hurts ye?"

I said, "Look at me, John Fortescue Eskdale; look at me."

"And I am looking," said he.

And I asked, "What do you see, will you say?"

He sat back a little so that he could see me the better, and his clear keen eyes ran me over as if he would let nothing escape.

"I see a brave man," he said gently. "With a grave face though the eyes be hot. I see him in a fine red coat with silk at his vest and lace on his sleeves. I see him gallant in his walk and proud in his speech. I see him as my eyes have pictured him though the years be sore and bitter long—Margaret's son."

I cried passionately: "Margaret's son! But she left me; she left me. You were the stronger; you took her. I was the weaker; I lost her. Listen, lis-

ten. You see me as you think, as I stand here, a gentleman, a gallant. A man whose coat has perfect quality, whose lace is scented, whose hands are clean, whose hair is neatly dressed, whose word— Look at the sword! A pretty jeweled toy, fit to hang at the side of any man of quality, a foolish pricking pin, a dainty bauble for a gentleman—yet for me—think you it suits?"

He said dryly, "Why, I have used a leaner blade; what of the sword?"

I said: "A trick, a trick, I tell you. And so am I all tricked out to fool such fools who pass my way! A pretty man, you think; a brave face, you say. Would you think it brave when it was set with working? Would you call me brave if you could see me stripped and half naked, blooded about the body and sweating from the fight? If you could see my head, set all a-swagger with a colored handkerchief, if you could see my fingers stiff about a sword as long and lean and thirsty as a man's parched tongue. If you could hear me shout about my business. Shout words, vile words with bloody meanings to them, cruel black-guard words from a mouth that has no room for sweetness, would you call me brave?"

He said very softly, "Yes, I would call you brave—for telling me." He added: "Not for blaming her. That's not her son."

And I shouted back at him, "Not hers alone; will ye forget there was a man to it!"

He was on his feet in an instant, his finger to his lips, his eyes shadowed cunningly. "Wheesht!" he

said in my ear—and was at the balcony, peering into the garden—at the door staring down the passage. For a sick man and one so lame I marveled at his nimbleness.

He shook his head at me, his mouth crinkling humorously. “Eh, Peter,” said he, “I’m doubting that ye have not lessons yet to learn—the tongue is better still than lifted high.” He stood a little away staring at me intently. “So the wolf cotched ye?” he muttered. “I would to God, Peter, I had caught the wolf.”

I said brutally, “Easy said when the door is shut.”

I thought he flushed the slightest, but he retorted with a whimsical lift to his shoulders: “It was never open. We had different masters, he and I; our ways were forever strange. Now—” He paused and looked at me with an odd intensity, “And now it seems I have but to stretch my arm and touch him, O mine enemy! and I cannot, for he is your father!”

And I found myself repeating dully, “My father!”

He went on speaking, I fancy, more to himself than to me. “He frightened her. It is a terrible moment, Peter, when a man frightens a woman. I have seen such a terror in her eyes should she hear his name, I have shut mine own against the horror.” He put his hand out and touched me gently. “You would not chide her going, Peter, had you met that look. Had you but known—what you know now, that she would see him had he stayed.”

And I had a sudden terrible vision of that cold, cruel face against the quiet beauty of my mother. I remembered how she had fled with me in her arms from

town to town, and how in those hurried nightmare journeys that face must have seemed to follow her all pressed up to her shrinking shoulders. The sweat began to prickle out on my face as I realized how two women had fled from this man and how I was tainted with his blood, and he had left his mark on me in such a way that even my mother, had she lived, might have turned and run from me, her son, as she had once fled from her husband.

I said heavily: "No, I could never chide her; I never have. I only envy you; that is all. Envy you for those two years I missed. Had I known her alive somewhere, who knows? I might have got away before it was too late, before I became so tangled in this infernal madness of my father. As it was there was nothing—or very little. My aunt, my home. They did not tie me fast enough to land when I had smelt the sea."

He said with gentle irony: "What, so weak? Tush, boy, break the back of it! There is a strength to every soul. Pick up your heart; get where ye belong; there's time yet."

He set me crazy with quick anger. "Ah! But that's what I would know. Belong? To whom? To what place, to what part, to what creature? Who would own me? Who would put out a hand and touch me and say, 'Mine'? I am outcast, outcast; I go with the sea, up and down, up and down——" I stopped and stared at him, and leaned in closer, with a sudden furious longing to explain—if I could. "Understand, understand! Will ye not see? I am caught by

its tides; I am whipped by its salt. It prisons me, and I, dear God, am willing enough prisoner."

"So I thought once," said he. "When all my love was locked about the heather, then I turned my back to it for one named Charles. To trail my coat forward and backward in lands that made my eyes smart wi' their foreignness; and know my body will turn to dust on earth that has not been nozzled by the deer. There is a queerness to all life. The thing that holds ye now all stiff wi' passion gets cold beneath some other sun. I canna make it out; truth, I have tried. So will you one day when this is all dead and drear to ye."

I said sullenly: "Why will you talk this way? What prettiness is mine that I could sit at a decent table? There would be no room for me in houses!"

He cried, with some impatience, "Hoot, man, but worth the trying. And I tell ye when the time comes there 'll be no stopping ye. But what may come of it, and to what pass ye may be put, not a body can say. Quit yourself in harness; th' rest can look to itself."

"You are very sure, Mr. Eskdale," said I. "I would not see you hurt, and yet I doubt not you 'll grieve for me, the poor wretch that I am—that I 'm likely to be to my end."

He shook his head. "I grieve for other things. Lost kings, dead men, heather all stiff and dread wi' blood; one sweet face. For these I shed tears. Not for ye. Why should I so? You will be stepping out all fine to greet the unknown wi' a shout. Man, I will be envying you."

I said bitterly, "You seem very sure."

He nodded gravely. "Aye, that I am. So sure that I have these many years laid up for ye at Child's Bank in London." And as I exclaimed, he stopped me with a wave of his hand. "Ah, but hear me out. At Child's, in Temple Bar; I could not get to you, Peter. In the years that followed your dear mother's death I was kept for ay doing this, doing that. Then came that bloody business at Culloden and all that weary waste of men. And so—" His face seemed suddenly to tighten as if the memory hurt; and then he faced me with a merry smile and cried: "And so I did this thing in secret through men who thought o' me in kindness. Not much; but maybe enough to help ye on when ye return."

I cried out in amazement: "But why? God's name, why this for me?"

He pulled his lower lip reflectively and stared away into the dark night.

"There was a woman," he said softly, "had a son, one Peter—" And there was a note in his voice which made me catch his hand and bend my face to it.

CHAPTER VI

I

WE started back to Isola Sound the next morning. We went out very early on a cold flat sea. In a world very gray and still, with just the slightest chill to it. Here and there a trembling star could still be seen, and there played about the misty clouds a faint reddish light which, as we passed on and out to sea, broke suddenly and flushed the water warm and pink.

It was my watch, and from the poop I watched the houses burn and fire beneath that sun and saw the land fade and fade into a mere narrow black line—and then no land at all, only the sea. And all the while it seemed I lived in a most curious dream, peopled, not by this ship and all its crew, not by the helmsman even or the huge space of sea, but by my mother and that quiet gentleman, Mr. Eskdale. I had spent half the night with him and listened like an eager boy to every little thing that he could tell me of her. I had regained, with a suddenness that startled, a glimpse of that world only known to me very slightly and for too short a time, where men did brave, simple things and had thoughts which might be reckless but were touched with marvelous gallantry. He had been kind to me. He had held my hands in both of his and kissed my cheeks at parting. There had been no show of scorn

or shrinking. We might have been as one and the same kind, he and I.

And yet I was back at the old life. Nor, though I searched my heart through and through, could I yet discover any great longing to be rid of it. A restlessness? Perhaps. But then we had been idle for some time, and there had been an odd disquiet among the men. A bitterness? Just possibly. Who would not, had they, as I, gone back so many years and thought again of so much love about me which I had since lost?

But beyond this there was a sharper thought. I could not grow old alone. There must be others with me. To the last my hands and brain must do business and not rest idle. I must go on in company because it was easiest so to drown remorse. Alone. I saw myself a haunted bitter man.

There was an end to it then. To Eskdale and my troubled mind; to wakened memories and sudden fresh wonderings. All gone. And I so little changed by that sweet talk as to shrug my shoulders and smile at my own earnestness. I was Peter the Cock; that was all. I was the son of my father. My mother—she had had John Eskdale and I no part with them. And yet there came the thought of all that money set in store for me at Child's Bank in London. How queer a thing is love that one man could save it so methodically for a child so little known to him, and all because he loved its mother. Did men do such things? And women make them? There was a magic in such matters I did not understand.

There were other things to irritate at that time. Too much quiet of late had set up a wave of discontent among the men. They never did well at Isola Sound, beyond the cattle running (for we had herds in charge of the Indians, and it was our custom to kill three times in the year at the full moon and keep much salted meat in stock), there was little enough to keep them from dirking and fighting, and when their pockets were empty they had a way of showing it. There was that, and my father's apparent indifference; also there was Pascal. It was Pascal who vexed the most. Ever since that affair at the tavern he seemed to hold some kind of resentment against me; he talked little; refused cards, and sulked apart. This vexed and puzzled me. For his was a quick temper of rage which passed with as much speed as it had come. This showed no change. And it was to me only he showed his face; and because Pascal and I did most things together, I sulked also. Then came the final flare.

I had been with some of the crew gilding the ship's figurehead, painting her sides. Blazing work in a sun that blistered your hands even as you held the brush; maddening business when the men were out of hand and shirked and snarled like the brutes they were.

It was late when it was finished, and I was hungry, and the sight of that cool room in the old palazzo, the placid content of my father, Pascal, Jamie. Their stomachs filled, their wine all ready set at hand, made

me furious. It might have passed had not my father in his usual hectoring manner grunted:

“Would ye be taking all the night at it? Have you not learnt to drive men? Did you let them lick the paint on with their tongues?”

Up went my temper. It needed but a spark to set it flaring. I was in no mood for his sneers. I knew I looked a pretty sort of man with naked legs and ragged shirt, smeared with paint, grimed with sweat. And he could sit like some great lord at his table and blare at me, while Pascal smirked and Jamie made frightening noises with his foolish mouth.

I let out with an oath: “Have you remember I’ve done two men’s work this day. Up with the sun and down with it! Who else would give such service? Only your son, and you know it well, and use him well, by God, and give him well and call it fatherly!”

And then Pascal chirped in: “Oh, ho! The pretty boy, the darling babe. My Peter, will you turn preacher and tell us all how naughty and ill we go about our duties?”

I hardly noticed him; my fury then was set upon my father. I said impatiently:

“Why chatter so? You were set about more prettiness than ship paint and idle men. Skirts are sweeter to lie upon than tar and ropes; why weary your tongue?”

Foolish to speak so to Pascal, remembering his mood; but I had not remembered, and the thing was done.

And Pascal was all pruned up like a turkey and twitching all over his round face and screaming:

“Passion of my heart, I’ll have no cock-crowing from such a bawdy chick. To laugh at me, is that it? To set a trollop steal my purse and split his bastard sides at the fun o’ it? To slap me in the face with talk of duty and spy on my every movement. A cock, all feathers, who’ll talk of any hen the whole night through. What of your John Eskdale? What of your Margaret? Margaret! Ah, have I cooked you, my cockerel? You will so blush for her. A bawdy chick, did I not say so? Margaret, oh, Margaret——”

He staggered me at first. So I stared like a fool; then with a rush my senses came, and seeing right beneath me—half eaten and all thick with sodden fat—a bird, it seemed the easiest thing to catch it up and send it flying straight at that mocking face, so that his jaws clacked together with a snap, and his wig slipped to one side and then hung there as if stuck by the gravy. The thing was so quick I hardly know how it happened, but I had a sword in my hand, and he already striking at me with his and our blades clashing. We would have kept at it till morning and one was dead and the other dying, but my father and Jamie were quicker even than our cutting. And I was caught and held by Jamie’s bony arms ere I could thrust my point. And there was Pascal held by my father, his plump arms stiff to his sides, so that the sword dropped to the ground and he could only jump and slither with his feet in vain endeavor to get away from that giant embrace.

It was my father I could hear the best even above the shrieks of Pascal: "Drop swords, ye vile dogs, and keep away from such bloodiness, or with the morn I'll have you swinging high!"

But Pascal would only mouth on: "I'll spit him yet. I'll bleed his heart out. Let go thy hands! I'm no servant, no servant, I say. I'll do as I will! A cock to crow so—I'll rend his feathers; I'll prick his stomach."

And all the while I was wrestling with Jamie, who seemed suddenly a veritable colossus by his strength. "Leave go of me, Jamie. By God, this is my affair, not yours. Undo your fingers, can't you? All right, Pascal; shriek your tongue out; 't is your last chatter. God's oath, I'll speak the last word this time!"

And like a never-ending stream there gurgled on in my ear Jamie's husky voice: "Now keep quiet, Mr. Peter; go softly, can't ye? Lordy, boy, his blood would but stink your nostrils. Nay, pull not; there is no use to it. Listen now to your father; he'll not do to be angered. Have your wits, boy; you'll need them for him—let Pascal be." And he loosed me suddenly.

How did he know, I wondered. And could he make so true a guess? He was shrewd enough for all his sodden ways. Of course he was right. Pascal was of no account. His tongue had slipped too far; that was all. But the consequences lay between my father and me; Pascal was out of it. The mere mention of his name from Jamie, and my anger had gone. I flung my sword to one side and waited. He would speak right enough; I knew that. I don't know what quieted

Pascal, whether he sensed something was afoot and he for once outside—actually I suppose he had little or no chance to make himself heard once my father had thrust him clean on one side and stepped right up to face me. Anyway, he hushed abruptly and stood a little apart, sucking his thumb like a naughty sulky boy and staring all the while with bulging eyes at the two of us.

There was a blackness on my father's face such as I had never seen before and do not think I ever saw again. It was not just the old mad fury of the religious fanatic, well enough known to me, but the cold, calculated anger of a man wrestling with a frightful rage. His face a mask, all color gone, his eyes pricking me through and through, as if they would scorch and burn to my very skin. His upper lip a tight thin evil band; his lower lip full and red like an open wound. And when he spoke his voice seemed cracked with hoarseness, while it seemed he could only chant over and over, "Margaret, Margaret, Margaret!" three times, and pause, and raise his hands above his head, his fingers tight into his palms, his knuckles sharp and gleaming, yet only continue, "Margaret, Margaret, Margaret!" and whisper: "I am no stranger to that name, nor to that other, too. How goes it, Eskdale? What have you to do with this man Eskdale?"

I answered steadily: "Much. More, I sometimes think, than I have with you."

He said between his teeth: "A vile gallant, a libertine. A lustful thieving dog, yet you would talk—" He said violently, "God's name, what talk had you?"

"Of my mother," I told him. "Of Margaret."

There came the surprised shrill voice of Pascal: "Your mother? Pox me, what folly!" And he clattered to a chair and began drinking noisily.

I hardly heard him, and I do not for one instant think my father did. He stood with his hands clapped to his ears, swaying to and fro and moaning all the while:

"Down, down, down. Am I to sink so deep into the mire, ere I see God? First the woman, now the son—" He thrust out a lean pointing finger at me, and cried passionately: "Were you my true flesh you would have brought the dog to lick my feet. You would have lashed him from his kennel and not kept your hands quiet until he hung foul meat for all the birds."

I went close up to him, so that his outstretched finger pressed against my arm, nor did he move it while I spoke. I think then all the hot fire which had leaped so red when he first caught and trapped me—all the old shame, the bitter agony—spun uppermost again. I know his face seemed distant and all blurred. I know my blood drove and crashed within my ears until its drumming nearly deafened me, and when I spoke my words were thick and choked.

"Why use that word 'son?' It is not good for you, nor 'wife.' Let us keep quiet on such things, you and me. Hear this though: I had a chance from John Eskdale; I had a hope from him that was more fatherly than any of your offering. I could have stayed with him; I could have had his protection. But you have

suckled me well. I have caught a thirst from you I cannot quench, and as you caught me so am I caught again, and there is no escaping. And if there were, you are my father, and I remember that, if you forgot when you came out to Bristol. Men when they are old have need of their sons. The bonds press tight, you see."

I hurt him then. I saw his face quiver, and I was glad of it, for my outburst had come of no little distress on my part. Yet he said quietly enough: "I see in you as I know myself in my ungodly youth. I could have taught you peace, but there is a vainness in you, Peter. I would have seen you walk with God, but so it seems you will be rigid to your own false path."

I was cooler now, and I could afford to laugh and cry at him despite the rankling misery of my mind.

"Who taught it me? Who pointed it out and said, 'Follow'? I have done it well enough. I have been of good service; but God—I will not make mock of God!"

I had suddenly become very tired. I went away from him and sprawled on a seat by the open window and stretched to the rack for a pipe.

From beneath, in the great open hall, came gusts of laughter and singing. Two women were quarreling, their sharp cries ringing out every now and then above the broader riot. A great moon stood like a plate in the sky, and a hot sluggish breeze stirred the torches dotted here and there up the broken street. I thought

of the mellow quiet of that room at the tavern and the sweet tranquillity of my evening I had spent there. There was an ache at my heart for the peace that some men can have about their own quiet room. I felt suddenly I would have liked such a place, and I knew with a pang how much I had lost and how much I could never now regain. I was forgetting my father almost, when I became aware he was at my side staring down at me, with all the old serene beauty in his eyes.

He said slowly: "I grieve for this misunderstanding which lies between us. Believe me, I have drunk my cup."

I turned away from him. When he looked so he stirred me oddly, and I felt I could not bear much more that night.

"It was not fair," I answered, "to make me share it with you. God's name! it is a sorry pass we have come about."

He sighed a little and muttered; "Ye drive me sore, Peter. No man is sorrier than I." And then out flashed the old arrogance: "Yet I am the mouthpiece of the Almighty; the children of Babylon must reap their own harvest."

It was my turn to sigh now, but I doubt if he heard. He stood silent a minute and then asked:

"This Eskdale—this—" He was, I think, about to call him some name and then suddenly checked himself and stood muttering. He went on in a cleared voice: "What of him? When we touch Spanish Town again."

I said dreamily: "I shall not see him; take peace on that. He is a dying man while I—even if he lived, the thing is done between us."

With a sudden burst he said sharply: "I would see to his death. For adulterers there should be no slowness."

I took my pipe from my lips and stared up at him. "Then you would lose me first," I said; and I reminded him brutally, "And you are growing old."

3

I suppose Pascal must have been near. I might have imagined that. I knew how long and eager his ears were. For at that instant his shrill voice burst out suddenly and at our very shoulders: "'Pon wig, how true our sucklings are! 'Out of the babes,' does not the reading go?" He looked suddenly at my father, taking snuff the while. "Passion of my heart, 't is not only Peter but each man of us who knows that truth. Old men should sit and rest a while. There is no leg to them, no briskness of wit." He shut the little box with a click and flicked his ruffles. "Pox me, we grow large with indolence. Rest your feet if need be, but we must move."

I saw my father stiffen like a dog, and the cords of his neck seemed suddenly to knot and bulge. "Damned rat, what insolence is this? Am I to draw your teeth to keep you quiet?"

But Pascal seemed not one jot discomfited. He flicked all the more with his laces and pricked on his toes with extraordinary impertinence even for him.

"Oh, tush!" he squeaked. "Draw my teeth, and there 's an end to my fellowship; and besides you dare not—" He stopped as my father caught him suddenly by his coat and shook him until his face shone purple, and roared until the room echoed:

"Dare not! This to me! I have a servant. Death is a handy man with his blade, but it grows blunt within its sheath; must he sharpen it, son of a Jezebel?" And he let him go with such violence that he crashed to the floor and sat there, his legs thrust out before him, shaking his fists and screaming until the spittle ran down his lips.

"Old, old, old! Old and crazy, and yet to have the gulls pick your eyes! Set your villain at me, and will it make you younger? This is your end; I 'll have no more. I 'll do naught; go rot in the dung-heap, fool of God." Then I stopped and caught him and stood him on his feet and jerked him by his collar and bawled into his ears:

"Enough, Pascal. Speak sense. What chatter is this? What talk with the men?" But he would not answer. He could only splutter and gurgle and curse until I let him go and called to Jamie, now drinking hard, "What 's with the men?"

He was very nearly drunk and spoke with difficulty. "Oh, Lordy, 't is their livers; they need livening. Does not do to let them lie. They talk of empty pockets. Curse me, they 'd like 'em stuffed to the bursting."

He tilted his cup to his mouth again and was well in the drinking of it when my father had reached

and torn it from him so that he was left with the stuff pouring over his chin and dress and coughing wildly:

"Fish that ye are, be dry for once. What's this of me; what this of my years?"

"Lordy!" gasped Jamie. "I have near swallowed my tongue. They think there's no heart to you; they want a rakish dog to run to hell with them. Like Pascal maybe—" he waved a foolish hand. "Or Peter, even me—" He hiccupped and laughed together. "Like me!"—and reached for the bottle.

There was a quickness to my father which even surprised me. Like a cat he had swung about on his toes and was out of the room and clattering down the stone steps to the great hall before I could collect my scattered wits or Jamie bend the bottle to his glass. He even sobered Pascal, who struggled to his feet brushing and patting his coat and gabbling.

"'Pon wig, what starts the old fox now?" and then stopped and gaped and stared, as there came to our ears the hammering of the great bell.

Nothing short of an appearance of some enemy could have startled us like that clanging bell. There was only one other occasion which put it to use, the numbering and picking of the crew for *The Five Wounds* before we started out on some expedition. But the three of us, staring and wondering, knew well enough it was not for that reason. I think we said nothing, but of one accord turned and went beneath.

It was a great silver bell, left by the Spaniards.

And against it stood my father, not pulling the rope but striking the clapper itself again and again like a madman, until from all parts men ran and stumbled and rushed so the place was packed and then the clanging ceased. And my father stood there and looked at them, yet did not speak. Stood till and silent, like an image, but let his eyes travel from face to face and gave to each face separate and different thoughts.

In that huge place, with its silvered pavement and gaunt black pillars, they stood and shuffled and muttered and stared. Men of all sorts and kinds, and women pressing in. Some hidden in the shadows, some well caught by the light from a spitting torch, and others by the freak of moonlight made white as wax. And not a man among all those men my father did not know by name and face. And not a man he did not search and search again until they flushed and shuffled all the more. And when he spoke there was a great scorn in his voice.

"Old, am I?" he said. "Old and too brittle for the likes of ye, too soft a man, too full of age; no use but a mock, a laugh, a fool? To be put in a corner and bidden 'Lie there'? To be pricked by the knife and trussed by the rope, so do ye scheme?" He stopped and stared again among them, so that some began to whisper uneasily among themselves, and one to laugh, and one or two to swear loudly. They never tried or vexed my father. I wonder if he noticed them, for I think some would have answered, and I know my hand slipped to my pistol and I shot a quick glance at Pascal to see if he had his already primed,

but the matter was different from our expectations. I saw my father spring suddenly from the platform to the ground and shout, with such a fury that a sleeping dog sprang barking to his feet: "And what of you? How would ye be named? Men?" With a gesture that took them all aback, he shot out a hand and caught the nearest, a fellow big and roughly bearded. A man so thick of thigh and broad of shoulder that by rights he should have towered above my father. As it was he seemed to wither up beneath those thin, hard fingers, to redden like a girl, and stand like a fool, a loutish, overgrown fool. He could not help it. There was a power it was not possible to withstand, a strength—I had known no man with such a strength.

He asked grimly: "A man, this? Because his flesh hangs thick and loose, because he is pricked out with hairs and his breath stinks? Would you insult God and name him a man?" His grip shifted to the poor devil's throat, lingered there sufficiently for him to let out a loud bawl of pain and fear; then he let him loose with such violence that he crashed upon the floor and stayed there, neither did any one of them attempt to touch him.

But my father simply turned back to his former place on the platform. Speaking again almost immediately, he hardly raised his voice, and there was no need for him to do so. They were listening now.

"All these years, and have ye not yet learnt manners? A lean man am I. Too lean for such sweet tastes as yours. And yet which one of you would

match his fat against the cunning of my bones? I am too gray, am I? Fools, was not each hair of Moses whiter than the wing of a goose, and yet a man whose muttering coward children could not cross the Red Sea without his rod? Hark ye! I am Jacob of the Sword; my hand is not so old it cannot point 'the blade. Hark ye, I am Jacob of the Red Hand, and your blood is stain enough for my fingers without leaving my gates. And hark ye again: I am Jacob with the Mouth of Fire, and there is God behind my words. Dogs, do I not feed your bellies? Dogs, do I not stuff your pockets? Dogs, do I not lead ye from sleek beds to bloody things, such as ye delight in, to gain which is your joy? Lead out—and lead in! Who knows the shoals but I? Who knows the safe way in? Who brings ye back to kennels and lets you lie there in your fat and vain content? Hark ye to this: out beyond the shoals there is room for many, and not too many that the brig cannot be crammed to her uttermost, with all thy filth, and get her way out—but find no man from here to bring her back.”

The things was done. I loosened my fingers from my belt and glanced at Pascal, sulky and full of gloom, lolling back against the wall, and at Jamie, half asleep, drowsing in a huddled heap at my feet. The moment had passed, and they knew it. My father might have been an old babbling man, and yet held them. They had sucked comfort from him for years behind the shoals on Isola Sound; they did not dare to quit. And still my father had not done. They were for all the world whipped dogs, longing to slink away and get

to bed, yet could not move until he gave the word; and he still kept them. He said:

“Now spread your ears and harken. I have a nest for ye to clean. I have a town which runs with gold and needs some sweeping. Santa Verde, a place of Spanish dogs where they have piled treasure for years. Santa Verde, not over big, not over massed with men, but a storehouse of treasure to which their ships come year by year and carry back to deck their king and priests. Santa Verde! Speak with the Indian runners, speak with hunters who camp with us; they know the place. They know it stands like Moloch stuffed to its hidden chambers, piled to its very walls, a jeweled town! Ye know me well; have I not feasted ye? Have I not sucked ye with such drink unknown to other men? Know this: here is a feast unknown to men since Morgan sacked Panama. Here is a drink will set you drunken in your stride when you see it rich and gleaming beneath your very eyes. Santa Verde! A town of Papist dogs, but yet to be another Jericho, and by my hand another pillar rising up to God.”

4

All that night we sat and planned and talked, my father, Pascal, Jamie, and I. All through the night and all the while from the street and hall there came the constant racket of the men.

They had a business now on hand; they would not sleep to-night. A moving, jostling, hurrying crowd; yet showing some kind of order. Forever and again there would come the shrill whistle of the boatswain

and the sudden tramp, tramp, tramp of feet, when certain men would pass lumbering to the boats great packages of food-stuffs, powder-barrels, fighting weapons of all kinds, extra sails, extra ropes, all manner and kinds of things which would be needful for such an expedition. They were drinking to the last and would go aboard drunk; that did not matter. Once sober, theirs was a hot eager way, more than sufficient.

But we four in the big room hardly thought, hardly listened to their babble. For once there seemed a shade about our council, not so much of the swagger, perhaps, a deeper show of thought. We were to attack a town of much wealth and value, but an inland town; some difference there.

I remember how my father unfurled a great chart, and we pushed about it and talked and pointed and jostled with each other with endless dispute and suggestion. And then turned suddenly dull and even irritable and loitered about the room, picking at food, watching my father, all the while watching Laughing Death. When he had done with the map it seemed to catch his fancy. He spread it wide and sprawled atop of it like an ungainly spider, and with his finger dipped in wine or using lumps of fat or meat, traced certain places and paths, chuckling to himself and forever glancing beneath his long lids at his chessmen in the far corner of the room where he had left them set ready to play.

It was the three of us—Pascal, Jamie, and I—who spoke the most; and, of the three, Jamie the least. Sometimes he even went to sleep, to wake with a start

and speak very loud. Sometimes he only muttered and sighed, and we let him be and kept the talk between us, Pascal and I.

"In-fighting," Pascal called it, and would stop the loving polishing of his great sword to glare at my father and shrill again:

"A plaguy silly business. What good has ever come from fighting inland? Pox me, there is no prettiness to such a thing, to leave the ship and shift upon our toes until two moons shall rise and pass. A rare folly!"

"Then come not," my father answered dryly. "Sit here and spin."

This sarcasm seemed lost. He only flourished the blade and deftly cut an apple clean in half without leaving so much as a scratch upon the table where it lay. "Oh, tush!" he retorted; "my steel is peevish as it is with lying in. Wives have there been to flick with their skirts, point noses in the air, and be gone—for lesser treatment than my lady bears."

"She will find warmth enough," I told him, "and play enough to make up for her idleness." I leaned to him and asked intently: "Why this soreness? We have done bigger things than sack a town of two hundred men. I rather like it, Pascal, to break them in the midst of all their glory of treasure carrying. They have dodged us before at sea; this is better than searching the sea."

Pascal gave a squeak of exasperation. "O vain and foolish child, where goes your learning? For what is a ship but for sailors? For what is land but

for those who tread it easily? Learn reason, child, learn reason; or will you wait until it finds you out?"

I stared at him doubtfully. There was something puzzling in this new Pascal. "There have been men—" I began, but he tapped with his foot upon the floor and shrilled loudly:

"Oh, tush to this chatter! What pretty ninnies were they, and how neatly the earth coffined them! I like not worms; there is no savor to them."

There came a start from Jamie and the exclamation: "Hell to it! The place has trees thicker than prickles on a hedgehog's back. Three leagues of it; small room for sword-arm, easy to pick with shot."

Pascal bounced in his seat. "So, so! What merrier holiday? Now to play 'peep-bo' and 'pretty pretty come and be killed'! Pox me, we go a-birds-nesting!"

My father turned suddenly and stuck his great lip out and drew his brows into one thick line.

"Is your heart milk? Why, dog, pick out a tree and hide your stomach behind it if ye can. I know those feet; there is a cunning to your hand which knows no equal. You come down the river with me, Jamie and Peter." He jerked his head at us. "Keep to the wood."

Pascal beamed. "There speaks a man. Your father shows a refinement which makes me love him. My legs are not for marching order." He stretched them wide and surveyed them with much admiration. "They have a roundness which shows perfection in a stocking but are of such delicacy they sweat with pain when put to scrambling, yet can skip in tune with my sword."

He sighed and bent to stroke each with a caressing hand. "Ah, sweets, how many eyes have you not tempted! And how you can dance—dance to my merry song!"

I asked impatiently, "When do we start?"

"With the next night." My father had moved and was staring from the window.

There came a mixture of a sigh and a groan from Jamie. He was staring across the table with blurred and swollen eyes and swaying as he sat. "Christmas day," he muttered, "Christmas day!"

My father swung round and glared at him darkly. "What better day? Christ's day for Christ's arm."

From beneath there came sudden and very loud singing:

"We laid them aboard the starboard side,
With hey, with ho, for and a nonny no;
And we threw them into the sea so wide,
With hey, with ho, for and a nonny no."

Said Jamie, rolling on his seat. "I have heard better songs than that; how sing they?" He paused and stared stupidly, his fingers fumbling together. He started suddenly in a singsong cracked voice:

"Remember God's goodness,
O thou man;
Remember God's goodness,
His promise made.
In Bethlehem He was born
Christmas day a' i' the morn . . ."

He stopped and repeated vacantly: "*Christmas day.* I cannot remember." He began to laugh foolishly.

"No memory. Curses o' God, no memory. Yet I did go caroling—" His eyes suddenly fell on Death, and a paroxysm of rage crossed his poor face. He leaned forward and shouted:

"Will you grin, you dumb devil's son? Would you mock? I can sing, I say; I have tunes—" He stopped and put both hands to his head. "This is blackness. Lordy, it comes too quick, too quick." He began to whimper, holding his head and rocking to and fro, while we just sat and stared until my father shouted, "Give him to drink, one of ye!"

Then I filled his glass and pushed it to his elbow, and he caught it and flung the stuff down and sighed and fell asleep again.

I crossed to my father and asked uneasily, "You will stick to the day?"

He said shortly, "Why should I change it?"

I stared at Jamie, breathing heavily. "Sweeter things have happened on that day than thoughts of bloodiness."

He frowned and let his eyes rove from the sleeping Jamie to Pascal, using his sword against a chair-back with wonderful ease and dexterity, and then to Death, now on the ground at his game—last to my face, where they rested with certain earnestness.

"Boy," he said slowly, "I have much hazard on this business. They spoke aright; I grow old; much I have done, much left undone. This have I held to my mind for years past and waited. I would not wait too long. Now I would speak for God the last time, but in a big voice—as with a trumpet."

I sighed and turned away. There was no use in speaking when he held this mood. Santa Verde! Wonderful name, ringing with music, ringing with marvelous fruits. How sweet a thing can be a name; how bloody can it sound in after years!

A sudden soft chuckle made me turn and stare at Death. He had made some move and now sat back hugging himself with merriment. I asked idly:

"Check?"

He shook his head and gesticulated with both hands, touching the men from square to square so that I could follow their moves. I laughed, and cried with admiration, "Check-mate!" and bent to mark afresh the skill of his play.

Said my father suddenly, "Here is the dawn."

CHAPTER VII

I

WE sailed from Isola Sound just past midnight on Christmas day. A warm night with a gold sky, so fiercely did the stars jostle with each other. We were one hundred and eighty-one all told; and mad as each man was who set about that expedition, he was no madder than those he left behind. They followed us out, some waist-high in the water, others rowing helter-skelter in the boats. They sent toast upon toast bawling after us, breaking their bottles on the ship's side, drinking from the cracked mouths. They lit great torches so that even when we were quite out of the shoals we could yet see those tossing flares of light rushing hither and thither as comets race.

For my part one thing stood out above the riot of that night, a matter of mine own. Months past my father had taught me the way of the shallows; now I, for the first time, took the helm of the brig and followed in the wake of *The Five Wounds*. And in doing so I knew then how completely I was my father's son. He had said nothing, made no certain sign, but almost stealthily had passed his office on, had beckoned me in closer to his side. Here went the signal to each man, and no man could fail to see it: "When the time

comes, here stands your leader. When the hour strikes, here is the hand to steer you on."

2

Three hours later I was back again in *The Five Wounds*, and later still at my watch. I loved such nights. I loved such quiet sea. I was the wakeful man, and I alone. The drowsy fellow on the lookout did not matter. I was the waking, watching man then, and all about me lazy sluggish forms slept and groaned and dreamed. But I had all the wonder of that great still sea. I had all the beauty of that spreading sky. I had all the magic of complete tranquillity. I might have been the only living soul among dead men. The only moving thing on a phantom ship; mine was this moment, and the wonder of the next few hours kept secret only to me. This night! I think the night bewitched me.

I fancied there seemed some stealthy movement in the very night itself, some hidden mystery I could not comprehend. A sense of beauty, dim, remote, piled up with wonder. A sudden hungry dread lest it should pass before I understood. Something out there beyond that cloak of darkness. Some hidden loveliness too far for my reach, too wise for my vain looking. How mad is dreaming! Nothing beyond that space and quiet but Santa Verde. One week, and I would sack a town; one week, and I would lead a fight; one week, and where there had been peace and content, there would be wreckage and disorder. And yet the spell still held me. And when it passed I was conscious of

a curious ecstasy and uplift of spirit as if in one swift moment I had glimpsed the edge of some grave sweetness, as if the time would come when I might touch it with my hand and marvel at its beauty, at my understanding.

3

It was Jamie who disturbed my dream. His pale mooning face peered suddenly at my elbow, and his slow drawl broke in upon my thoughts:

“What think you, Mr. Peter, of this coming business?”

I knew that tone. He was in his most detestably sober mood when he would “mister” me with every word, and all the sexton side of him showed uppermost. I said curtly, for somehow I resented this break, yet I knew I could not shake him off:

“Why, God, man, what ’s wrong with it, eh? Would you suck your thumbs forever? What do I think of it? Why, nothing, but it ’s been monstrous slow in coming.”

He shook his head gloomily. “As Pascal says, it is but crazy to get in-fighting; I care not what I fight nor how, but ’t is no proper season to go out with bloody hands.”

I said brutally: “You ’d stay at home and sing hymns? Men are not wanted with faint stomachs!”

I saw him flush. I knew the drunken Jamie would have drawn at that sneer. Then I would never have spoken so. It was this sober, pious, morose mood which teased each sense of mine—or did to-night.

He answered slowly: "Lord, Lord, do I offend? My stomach is well enough, though empty maybe, and like to grow melancholy."

I said impatiently: "Plague take your trick of tongue which leads mine on! We go together when the time comes; let it be cheerily. The thing is settled; the season has no part in it."

He retorted with sudden heat, "Easy for him with his face buried in the Scriptures!" He was staring at the light from the skylight of the cabin where I knew my father still read and prayed. "Easy for him. He does not need the drink. So easy he must check the bottles when we go sailing! But I—I am all shivering and cold without the warmth, and full of ghosts. He should remember, it's not Christian to keep me from my quiet."

I cried irritably: "Why, go hang for a crazy fool! Are we not all the same? Would you have us reeling round the decks because of parched gullet?"

He retorted with undue savageness: "Different for you, different for you, young fool! For me—" he stopped and turned away; and I could hear him muttering in his old timid way: "For me it presses close, but there's the steward, I must remember, for I love him. Aye, so, I love him heartily."

I crossed to glance at the compass and then walked aft to the rail and stared down at the running water. It was no use arguing with Jamie. I could only hope he might forget and go and seek his beloved steward. I knew well enough my father would not care. I think he hated Jamie as much as I when this fit

held him, for I had seen him ply him with wine yet keep it well from Pascal and me. He knew his men. We two drunk were little worse than dead; Jamie—Jamie was worth two sober men when well filled.

So I kept to the rail and felt for my pipe and tobacco. Then as I bent to light it, there came the patter of his feet again; he was at my side breathing heavily and questioning pitifully:

“Did you go the round wassailing, Mr. Peter?”

In the flash of my light I could see that his face was drawn and pained, yet though he called for pity I gave him none. Perhaps it was as well; he only would have thrived the worse on it. Yet it was beastly. I knew well enough I was the only creature he had to talk to, and there were times when we had comforted each other. But now—now I was out on a matter I knew would end as villainously as any we had ever put hand to. Why turn sentimentalist? There could be only humbug to it.

And I answered shortly and with a lie. “No,” I told him; “no, I thank God!” And smoked my pipe with great vigor.

His face fell, and I saw it and winced. But he went on bravely enough:

“Ever since I was little we went a-wassailing. There was jollity then; Lord, how we would put to it! Maidens and men, and no house we’d miss, and no house would not call us in, and make gay with us. I remember—”

He touched me eagerly on the arm. “I remember—” he whispered.

"Yes, yes," said I. "You remember—" and sucked at my pipe and leaned back against the rail, my eyes half closed. I heard very little of all his chatter. I was getting sleepy, his mumbling made me all the more so, but something he said or some sudden movement from the watch startled me and set me full awake in time to hear him suddenly very eager and childish.

". . . And he came to the top of the steps and cried out to us, 'See here, you rogues, is not this a famous present?' and there he had a bundle in his arms, just so small and thick we could not make a sight of it, and then one of us cries, 'Why, bless me, it's a baby!' and he laughed all loud and cried, 'Right the first time!' And, 'fore God, had us in, and made us each peep and look ourselves; aye, and, by God, kiss it for luck! 'This is my daughter,' he kept on saying. 'This is my daughter and your new mistress.'"

I stared at Jamie. He was talking very thick but very loud, and there was sweat running down his face, while he trembled all over. I said, half curious, half surprised: "Eh, what? Whose child? What were you saying?"

He stammered and stuttered, I think confused at my sharpness, "Why, Lord, the squire's, the squire's; I was telling—she was born that Christmas night—"

I said carelessly, "Oh, what was it, at Plover's Cove, eh?"

He said dully, "Aye, Plover's Clove."

I glanced at him quickly, then away out to sea. "What did they call her?"

He seemed to brighten, "Sorrel," he said. "Sorrel Lynden."

I said: "Sorrel? Why, faith, that's odd."

He nodded. "Red it means, and red she was, as I remember. 'T was the squire's wish; Sorrel he'd have it. Red as the earth, red as the heather, red as the stag. His words."

I said musingly, "Faith, there was color in those parts, I remember—" Then I bit my lip and checked my tongue. What use remembering? I said aloud, "Sorrel, Sorrel. Like the land?" I asked. "That was years back, Jamie."

He put his hands to his eyes and held them there, then let them drop like stone to his side.

"Ten, twenty, more. They mount; they mount."

The bell struck; I could hear a movement from the watch; their time over, they were ready enough, as I, for their beds. I moved from Jamie to the lee ladder, ready to get down and call Pascal. I stopped there to stare back at him a desolate figure on the poop. Something about his drooping body made me turn and go back. I put a hand on his shoulder and said gently: "Take heart, man! Some day—why there is strangeness, indeed, in store for some of us. Why not for you—Somerset way?"

He stared up with such a blankness I did not think he recognized me. He flung out his two arms, brushing aside my hand, brushing past me and away as if beset with a sudden fury.

He cried with an oath: "Keep talk of Somerset from your bawdy tongue! Neither for you nor me.

My dead body, rather." And rushed violently from the poop stumbling against the quartermaster coming then to report, and crashing to the deck below, where I could hear him bawling, "Steward, steward. . . ."

4

We were three days out when the weather took on a change. The wind died, so that we moved hardly at all; but the whole sea was caught in a sudden swell, and the ship lurched and pitched until hardly a man could walk straight. That night there were no stars, and when the moon rose it showed dull and thick, and the heat of that night was such that the men lay huddled about the deck all naked, and Pascal for once discarded his wig and showed a steaming head and a clammy shirt.

That night, also, the swell increased, until when the sun came yellow as an orange, we were staggering against each other, and some were caught with most deadly sickness.

By noon it had grown very dark; by the early evening we moved in immense blackness. Hardly one went to his bed, but stayed out on deck, not sleeping, but rather wakeful and stirred by much uneasiness. Just before we struck eight bells my father gave the order to lower topsails.

Said Pascal, when we were done:

"A timely order, but I would strip the poles. I'll swear a most provoking end to this vile sea; curse me if I speak not right."

I said, "They have done with the brig," and handed him my glass that he might see the better. We could just make her out by the light from her lantern and her roundhouse. Smaller than we, she was already shipping water, and we could see it foam across her deck and beat against her poop. Said Pascal with a shrug:

"Pox me, they 'll lie wet to-night! I will be damned where I stand if you and I, my pretty dear, do not suck much salt ere we see the sun again."

And almost at once my father cried suddenly, "Aft here; another to the wheel!" And a man came stumbling from the gloom and set his hands on the spokes beside that of the helmsman. At that instant there came the lightning.

It was as if a giant fist thrust from the heaven, sword in hand, and cut and thrust and drove and slashed and ripped the blackness from top to bottom and ripped again, a racing, running ribbon of flame. So were we then caught in a trough of fire—a fire which seemed to light our ship from bow to stern, and make each one of us a living flame staggering and trembling in bewildered fright. Swiftly, this assault of fire; and swiftly finished. And all those multitude of cracks which had rent the sky were instantly closed up, and we left silent and staring in wild expectancy of what was still to come from that pitch night.

I heard some voice cry, "Why, now we run in hell; this is a bloody end."

And then there broke the shrill pipe of the boat-swain, and with it my father's voice. "All hands furl sail. . . ."

They came out with a rush and scrambling of feet, but I think they were dazed if not frightened by the tense atmosphere, for they showed no order and went clumsily for the shrouds. I know I leaped into the midst of them and struck at those in my reach and bawled:

"Up, you dogs; up, you lame cattle. Drive to it; drive to it! Are you turned all thumbs, you infernal idle ducks!"

Give them their due, they sprung to it well enough and put good speed into their work, for it was none too pleasant clinging to the yards. At such a height we seemed pressed right up into the blackness, yet ducking this way and that with each plunge of the ship. It was just as we furled the mainsail the rain came. Cold rain; thick, cutting, driving rain. High as I was, I could hear it crashing to the deck like the breaking of thousands of egg-shells, like the splintering of broken glass. Dark as it had been before, this rushing rain completely cut away all sight. We groped and fumbled and caught at each other like blind men; it pricked and bruised our skin until I bent my stinging face. How I got down I know not, nor how any other of us managed. Once on deck, I sprawled and slid every inch of my way back to Pascal, where now, with another man, he was fighting the wheel.

He put his mouth to my ear and blared: "Hold to it,

Peter; hold to it! By God, she tears like an untrained colt. Harris is gone, whipped overboard like a handkerchief. 'Pon wig, there is no nicety in so much water."

I squeezed the water from my eyes and shouted, "Where 's my father?"

"Below with Jamie. Extra lashings needed for the guns; one gone loose when you were atop." He screamed suddenly: "Here comes the wind. Now use your wrists."

It seemed to leap at us like a hound suddenly unleashed. It caught our ship and shook her as such a hound would when closing with his prey. It was all over and around us. Flogging, thrashing, beating; pitching us this way and that, pitching the ship until it seemed she must be dragged down and beneath the surging sea.

Nothing so drunk as *The Five Wounds*. Staggering, heaving, beating into the very depth of the sea yet mounting to top it, caught by an immense pillar of water, yet crashing through with water streaming from her like a cataract.

Once, and we went down, down, down, and a figure came hurtling past me battered, screaming, and clutching, only to be sucked over the rail. And up, up, up, and the whole ship on top of us and the breath of my body seemed knocked clean out. Then, with a rush and a stagger, she was steady, and with a rush and a stagger the wind caught her again and battered at her sides until she seemed to shriek like a live thing. And all this while the wheel tore and raged and kicked

beneath our bleeding hands, until the other man screamed aloud of the pain in his arms and sank to our feet, when Pascal let out a kick and an oath, and his body slid away in the wash and was beaten and tossed from side to side until it vanished out of sight.

And Pascal shrieked, "This is a pretty way to hell; praised be, though, I can dry my shirt."

I shouted back at him, "Here goes our expedition!"

But he only roared, "Nay, 't is part of it; this is our merry holiday—yet but the start."

I said in his ear, "God grant a merrier finish." He leaned to me, but what he cried I never heard. There came a sudden crash, a tearing, rending sound, and with it, even above the storm, shriek after shriek of dreadful pain. The whole ship seemed to stagger and even stand still, then pitch so to her side that I could see the sea surging like a whirlpool beneath me, then as suddenly seemed to right herself yet lie aslant. I shrieked at Pascal:

"God's mercy, are we struck?"

He shouted back, "The foremast," and screamed the louder, "Now burst your heart if need be; cling to her, my duck; if we break loose we'll lick the sand ere the hour past!"

We stood there, blinded and beaten by the sea, lashed and sore from rain, battered and bruised by wind, cursing each other till our tongues ached as our bodies. Said I, as Pascal nearly pitched flat to the deck and the wheel dragged at my tortured arms:

"Are your legs water? Twist them about the yard, fat fool; press in with your belly; hold to it; hold to it!"

And Pascal: "A babe I'd rather have! A two-year weakling than thy flesh of powder! Off with shoes, cling naked. Ah, be damned!" and he slipped again cursing, and I storming at him the more.

"Dance with each swing; must there be a petticoat forever to help your balance? Swing to it, swing, God damn thee."

And Pascal: "She's over now! 'Pon wig, here goes our end! Now, now, this way, this way; with me, loon, with me."

And I with some triumph: "By God, she's not! Now pull, pull, I say! Lay to it; ho, ho! she's speaking!"

There seemed some pause in the gale, and I stared at Pascal, my lids stiff with salt, and he at me, the water running like a river down his face. And we both grinning and mouthing terrific oaths.

Said Pascal: "My duckling, I would kiss you. As cunning a hand as I have known! 'Pon wig, I may have ducats yet for that pretty jade in New York."

I said joyously: "I thought you gone once. By God, we'll make a day of it if we see shore."

There was a light at the edge of the sky which gave hope the weather was passing, and though the sea burst with as much fury there showed a lull to the wind. Out of the gloom came suddenly my father, his coat torn and his cheeks bloody, yet with a curious gleam in his eyes. He drew very near to us, his hand upon my shoulder. He cried in a huge trumpeting voice:

"Did I not tell you? There is no beauty like a ship—my ship, mark ye—bearing her naked breast to

the storm. She has a grace not known by any creature, when she goes riding out, when I can see her lift her face and laugh the sea away."

I heard a snort from Pascal; he screamed some answer which was lost in the wind. It did not matter; I had my own shouting to do. We were sodden to our very bones; there was no part of us which was not torn or bruised or was not numbed with weariness, yet my father could only babble of the ship!

I snarled in his face: "God's sake, what time have we to watch her beauty? Did we not hold her to it? I tell you she kicks like a mule and enough to break one as the rack!"

He did not seem to hear. He was caught by his own tremendous ecstasy, and even the continuous pitching did not seem to waken him.

He cried aloud, stretching both hands out to the maddened sea: "Ah, but you cannot rend her! She is a peerless thing. A spirit divine, which can break the sea as Christ once broke the tomb! I would not close my eyes to this, my darling; I would not deafen my ears to all these trumpets. Ride on! Ride on! Here walks my God this night!"

I wanted news; I shouted up at him, "We were near done, when the mast went; how with the rest?"

He stared at me as if I had been some stranger, and cried with an oath: "What do I care? Men come and go; what is their value but to answer when the challenge comes? I tell you, boy, I have no part with men, save to use their fingers and thumbs! Six feed

the salt; seven are work for the doctor. They showed a clumsiness and paid their toll."

I cried in dismay: "Thirteen! Hell to it, we have a villainous trouble!"

He retorted: "What of it? What of it? We have the ship!"

I cried, exasperated, "What use the ship when we go inland? What of the brig?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I know not—or 'any man. With the light—"

Said Pascal with sudden fury, "A pretty picnic, so we turn home with empty baskets!"

My father turned on him with sudden savageness. "Is your tail down, dog? Our road is straight."

I heard Pascal gasp, and he spat a great oath. "On, now? By God, you mean it?"

Said my father, "By God, I do!" and stalked forward.

5

Said Pascal, hours later, when we were taking our first rest after our struggle at the wheel. "There is a stubbornness in old men which sticks like marrow in a bone!"

He was crimping and curling his wig. Twisting each lock with delicate fingers, combing it out with sweet-oil. In his silk shirt and great ruffles, with his powdered cheeks and scented hands, you would have marveled where the sailor had vanished and smiled at the superb vanity.

"Like marrow," he repeated, "in a bone." He took a pinch of snuff and sighed and shrugged his fat shoulders.

I was half asleep on the settee, but I asked lazily: "One hundred and fifty in all, if that, to go a-marching. What think you we can do with one fifty men?"

He answered airily: "Much, my dear; much so far as feet and pistols go. It is their stomachs that will make them sour; half rations now, and sodden salt and water to boot; while drink—" He waved his hands hysterically. "They are not bees to sip, hark ye! What man, unless he be a giddy-head, would set his men to fight out of their ship with no more drink apiece than would fill their ear-holes?"

I drew my pipe and stared dreamily through the open stern window. There was a splashing, reckless sea now, all dazzled by the sun as if brushed over with a golden dust.

I said: "Odd, I want to get ashore; why do I want that, eh, Pascal? I have a sympathy with this expedition I have not known yet, curse me. I think I would be vexed did we turn back."

Pascal gave a squeak of indignation. "Oh, go burn for a flighty owl. The salt has spiced your liver, and the tavern calls. So with me. But I will give a silver dollar for every tavern in this nest of gold and jewels! Tush to it! I would rather it stood a town of fat meats and brandy, and I'll swear all men think the same."

Said I: "More the fault of the brig than us; they shipped a bigger sea, a wetter one; 'fore God, my

father's face was black as pitch when Clancy gave report. Poor fool, he'd rather feed the fishes than know that tongue."

"A lazy dog," murmured Pascal. "With fattened brain, mark you, he could not help the duckling—"

"Now we make up for it and help to stuff them!" I yawned and stretched. "We saved a good half and all the powder; oh, well, he might have lost the brig."

"He would not dare!" Pascal chuckled. "Dead—and he would find no sanctuary from thy father's wrath: they'd meet in hell. 'Pon wig, there is a cunning in Jacob 't would pierce the gates of hell."

I did not answer him. It was pleasant to lounge slack among the pillows after the tumult of the night. Good to watch that shining, bubbling sea, and feel one had done tussle with it.

We had lost badly in that storm. True, the brig had come through, yet with two men killed and three crippled. Significant as their loss was—we could not spare men—it could not compare to the swamping of their provisions, to the soaking of more than half the powder. We had to feed them now with ours, and we were short enough. There would be pressure, too, upon our arms. And yet my father would go on. And whatever any man felt not one of us knew. Each, I suppose, hugged his own silent thought, and each had possibly some wondrous fable wound round Santa Verde. It was to them a pretty thing to sack a town. There should be food and drink to find there; they were prepared to wait. If they ran loose—and it was passing certain they would—well,

what matter? We had no love for any Spaniard; they knew the trick of splitting throats as well as we.

Some sea-bird swooped to the very sea top, and seemed to rest there just for the fun of it; then, as a great wave burst, let out a harsh cry of protest and mounted upward, the water scattering like pearls from his spreading wings, the spray, like snow shaken from a tree, spluttering in its wild wake.

Pascal said suddenly: "You handled the brig from the sound. 'Pon wig, there showed much smartness; our leader, eh?"

I turned to stare at him. He now had the wig on and, with hands on hip, sat swinging from the table side, a certain knowing look about his eyes, a curious cunning in the shaping of his mouth.

I said, "You saw yourself; I know not more than you or any man what happens later."

He swung his feet and surveyed his buckled shoes with pleasure.

"You are his son; a pretty lad at that."

I said sullenly, "Oh, yes, he took good care to make me pretty, after his fashion."

"Oh, tut!" squeaked Pascal. "So are we all, all pretty men! Dogs of a kind with fancy for the same platter. And no man, I swear, has licked that dish with better grace than Peter, son of Jacob! What boots it? I would embrace you as mine own for that delight; I would embrace you threefold, when I can call you captain."

I cried roughly: "Hell take your running tongue! Son or no son, I would not lead. You have no

choice, nor Jamie, nor my father, not even I; the word goes with the men. I have but cut my teeth, but you, have they not watched you through the years bite hard and strong? I'll swear their choice."

Pascal sighed. "How innocent is thy wagging tongue. I lead? Passion of my heart, I have the carriage for such; there you speak truth. I have an elegance which shows at every turn. But what of that? They show an ill bred heedlessness to such a delicacy. You know the shoals; that is your pass."

I muttered, "I know the shoals."

He shrugged assent; he said slyly, "There was a nasty cunning in old Jacob when he thought that secret." He paused and added softly, "When he passed it on."

Something in his voice made me turn round and stare at him. His face was twisted up until I could only catch the gleam of his eyes through a slit of flesh; he had his head to one side, and there might have been the slightest flicker of amusement at his mouth.

I asked gently, "Eh, Pascal, how run your thoughts?"

He said pondering, "He had a hold, think you?"

I nodded, "You know it?"

He pursed his full round lips and shook his head. "They had a better one; had they but thought it out, the blockheads, as they may one day. With him it did not matter. He had a craze—" He stretched a hand and touched the cabin side. "This was his love, to do his bidding. But afterward—"

I asked gently, "Yes, afterward?"

He waved his hands apologetically. "'Pon wig, it puts a man in a most nasty corner; it traps him twofold."

I said, "Well, Pascal?"

"Once—" he ticked off one finger. "Once, by hot men near to be trapped themselves if he ran. Twice—" he ticked another finger, "Twice, by hot men knowing him loose, with a secret worth money if he told and their skins if they were tracked." He sighed and murmured beneath his breath, "A most unpleasant ticklish matter."

I slid to my feet and came near to him; I said thickly, "We should understand each other better, I think."

He shook his head vigorously until the great wig flew round his shoulders. "Why so? Why so? We have a bond; we stand brothers. See thus: some come, some go. Yet no man goes too long; we have our custom."

He was looking at me fully now; and I could see clearly the threat which marked his whole face, neither did I forget it in the after days. There was no speaking then between us; only a marked silence. We were seeing each other afresh and making much note of it.

Then came to our ears the sudden cry:

"Land ho!"

CHAPTER VIII

I

WITH the fall of night we were marched upon the beach of Santa Verde. There had been little confusion and no accidents, final instructions given to those who waited with *The Five Wounds* and the brig, final inspection of firearms, a last quick survey from my father, and a word or so to Jamie and me, before our two arranged parties separated and started away.

Said my father: "There should be no hitch. Get to the forest by morning; then take your sleep. Let them not lie too long; strike with the first show of dawn. We'll make good meeting."

I nodded. "I'll get the trumpet sounding when we clear the gate. You should hear it if we mark time each with each."

Pascal strolled up. "Much welcome to its pretty tune; I'll be there, my dear, to answer!"

He was in the highest spirits, but my father frowned. "As with God, so with us. The back is open; we should slip in lightly." He looked at me keenly. "You'll be the first to know how deep they scratch."

I laughed at the serious note in his voice; I remember how particularly careless and eager I felt that night.

"Hear you what 's saying? We 'll test their skins well, eh, Jamie? I 've a new blade that sighs for want of proper use. I 'll warrant it will show a knowing taste!"

Jamie stood swaying with his naked sword in his hands, his old tarnished coat hanging loosely about his gaunt body, a stupid leer at his loose lips, a dangerous light in his pale eyes. He spat and coughed and spat again and grunted:

"The longer they kick, the better for me. I like nothing short. I like it long and strong and fresh as new wine—" He paused and rocked the more and dug his sword into the sand and thrust his hands through his lank, straggling hair.

My father said: "Look to it, fish, you suck with care! Ye 'll not be carried; either the worms for you or the Spaniards. I 'll not idle for any toss-pot."

His eyes shone like two moons. He swayed back on his heels and exclaimed bitterly: "Why, Lord, how men do babble! Is not my stomach stale and my mouth dry for want of watering? Hell to it! What should I drink when there is nothing?"

His amazement made some of the men laugh, but there were others who turned sullenly away. There might have been trouble over Jamie, who demanded a full bottle if he was to be as useful as my father wished, and who would become most infernally stupid if he went sober. Shortage of wine meant nothing to him; he went well filled, and some men showed their teeth rebelliously.

So Pascal now exploded: "Why, plague take the

man, does not thy breath stink of my brandy? May the devil burn my wig if when we meet you do not stand as full as David's sow, while I—" he beat his chest and puffed with indignation—"while I and others must lick their lips and wag parched tongues! A most detestable beggarly affair!"

I said impatiently: "How much more time shall we waste? The men are in a fever as it is, God's sake; let's make a start."

And Jamie drew his sword from the sand with a great flourish and shouted, "Curse me, yes; shove ahead, shove ahead."

And a sullen growl came from the pack of men, already pressing and surging out of their rough formation.

My father snarled furiously; "This how you order your men? To shout like beasts? Will ye bawl to the world? Get you gone, then! Pascal! Drive to the boats."

Pascal swung on his toes, then round again, and caught me by the waist and kissed my cheeks with a flourish. "So take my blessing! I will be there to embrace you and to show my love—"

Of their own accord the men broke away and started as they heard my father's voice, passing those who remained to go in the boats with guttural oaths and hoarse whisperings of salutation and cheer; cursed in turn by Jamie, lurching at their side, his sword still drawn, now on his shoulder; led by the long thin figure of Death, who seemed like some grotesque shadow moving at their head.

I started to follow, then turned suddenly to my father. Pascal was fussing and fuming at the boats. He stood alone, his broad black hat entirely shading his face, his hands loose at his side.

I said heartily: "Sir! Good luck to us all."

But he did not move nor make any response, only remained staring fixedly out to sea. So I swung round on my heel and went after my men.

2

I caught them up and passed on to my place at their head beside Jamie. The night was dark with no moon, and we had to pick our steps, for the ground was rough and uneven, and we dared not risk a light. The men trudged in some kind of order, very frequently stumbling and lurching against each other, snarling then as dogs, and settling down again with thunderous growlings into their lumbering stride.

There was no idea of talk with Jamie; he was thudding along in uneven, heavy fashion, his head sunk to his chest, one bony hand swinging free with as much vigor as a pendulum. The other clasped about the hilt of his sword, which he carried, as always, on his shoulder. I had never seen Jamie with a sheath.

There was a new interest in this night marching, in getting further and further from the sea and the ship, in seeing nothing and knowing less, relying only on the peculiar senses of Death for our guide. There was a quality of strangeness in it which went very well with us all. And yet—we were a hundred, well armed tough, hot-blooded men. That was good. But some

I knew had known but a short hour's sleep since the night of the storm, and each I knew for certain had drawn his belt uncommonly tight, and out of that blackness—who could tell how many hundreds might not suddenly start out?

“In-fighting,” said Pascal. A pretty word for it; and how much of a fool's errand might it turn out? My father might go easy in the boats, but should we be cut off, I did not see him or any man returning by the river.

I looked at Jamie. Breathing heavily, clumsy with his feet, yet not so clumsy with his hands nor even so fuddled in his wits when the chance came his way. I stared back at the men, so many lumpish shadows, making already a bad business of marching, yet nimble and lively when the occasion suited; and I laughed beneath my breath at the thought of how warm they might make that occasion, once provoked. I looked ahead at Death loping along in his silent easy manner and laughed all the more. They might know their own band, but we had a warm way of greeting.

Some one began singing in a hoarse undertone:

“O, my name is Captain Kidd,
As I sailed, as I sailed.
O, my name is Captain Kidd,
As I sailed.”

Jamie, with surprising swiftness, was round upon him. “Shut thy bloody mouth! Will you call us for sale? Sing! I'll teach you singing. Learn walking first.”

I thought the man answered, but I did not hear. Death had suddenly come to a standstill and was pointing into the distance. We huddled behind him like a flock of sheep, jostling against each other, panting and staring. And now there showed a thin light in the sky and a small wind brushed my cheek. With much peering, as if through a gray veil, I could just make out a great black mass through the dimness, the forest.

For some while as yet we labored on its outskirts, and all the time the light grew and the white barks of the outlying trees showed out like little ghosts. Here the ground played havoc with our tempers and showed us those first miles were easy walking indeed. There would be mud-holes into which some man would flounder and pitch and curse and come on limping. There were sudden branches cutting our faces and thorns tearing our clothing. And worst of all, multitudes of black ants squeezing through to our very skin and biting there until some man would tear his body and bawl aloud in pain.

And all the while Death slunk along with an easy indifference which maddened me, and I remember shouting: "Name of a dog, is this much longer? Is there no other way? Why, God, man, we will rot where we walk if this is our path."

He turned round then and stood smiling. I can see him now, the evil mocking mouth, the great red scar, the scornful amused attitude.

He must have maddened the men as well, for I remember how they glared and even threatened. And

for all their noise he only gave one of his little noiseless chuckles, and made such a gesture to me that I might have been a prince or a fool, and walked on with a great show of humility, so that I could beckon on my men and follow cursing the while, until, quite suddenly, we seemed to pitch right into the forest and be closed in by its cool dark beauty.

3

Until the late afternoon we slept, posting our watches, our guns all ready at hand. It was Death who wakened me when our time came. For the moment I shook him off and lay a while, drinking in all the dim loveliness of this great still place. Nothing but marvelous greenery, broken here and there by the sudden flaring of some jungle plant; and far, far up those smooth cool trunks, there stretched continuous leaves and giant creeper, massed altogether like a great green web. Just here and there, between those twining fingers, there slanted thin golden bars from the dying sun; and there again hummed and murmured and glossed, right in its rays, birds and butterflies. I could just make them out now and again, lightly darting from shadow to shadow; I could just hear with sudden sharpness, the screech of some macaw. Pleasant so to lie and stare and dream, and marvel how small and insignificant the forest on Isola Sound seemed compared to this. Pleasant—and then I felt another twitch at my arm which brought me to earth and made me signal to Death to wake the rest. And I fell to watching them, in the same dreamy,

curious fashion. Stretching and yawning, noisy and sulky, as their sleep had made them; stuffing the little food each man had into his mouth and sucking it down with their last remaining ration of rum. Hairy, tough, villainous; with tarnished coats and gaudy handkerchiefs, with great rings in their ears and marvelous symbols on their chests and arms. What grotesque jest had brought them now, in all their ugliness, as disturbers of this tranquillity? And how great a part of that ugliness did I not share with them?

We marched on steadily through the evening and well into the night. We camped then in a clearing, not so very far from the forest edge, where it butted on to the town itself. That time we doubled our watch. We were a dull party; hungry, thirsty (all but Jamie), tired and bruised, having but one thought at heart and that was to get into Santa Verde as quick as possible and suck it dry and eat it clean. I fancy they would have pitched on without one thought of making sure the meeting with the rest, and with no thought of their own skins. They had my sympathy with all their grumbles; mine was no easy task to hold them in and snarl them down. They went to sleep at last in sullen heaps; and I, having no trust of their wildness nor Jamie's wakefulness, kept watch myself upon them and the sentries.

Terrifyingly still a sleeping forest. Not a sight, not a sound, only the darkness, muffled close in among the trees; and then behind it uncertain knowledge of some invisible force. Of some unknown, unseen mystery, lurking and brooding, watching and waiting. Once,

in that long silence, some rustle of leaves startled me to my feet and made me stand and stare sweating and caught with sudden panic. Had the Spaniards burst through the undergrowth, I think I would have welcomed them with joy. At least they would be human. But this loneliness, this desolation, filled me with a new fear, not of man or beast, but of something I did not understand or comprehend. There was a belief among the Indians that all forests were haunted. They thought with ghosts of men who once lived there, wandering souls who in the night came back with muffled crying and eager hands to gather in those who might chance their way. I thought it haunted, too; but not as they. Rather, by all that mighty jungle growth pitting its force against such trespassers as we, loosening its monstrous soul in silent protest. Rather, by God Himself stirring among the trees.

And when the first gray light filtered amid the gloom, the mood passed. I walked from man to man and kicked them into wakefulness. I joked with Jamie on his sluggishness and did not even envy him his bottle. This was my moment and his; this was the reason of our laboring march.

There was not overmuch excitement with the men. There was a savage restlessness, born of too little meat and drink; I knew that spirit well. It would require careful handling. They would stuff their bellies and be soaked in wine up to their eyes before they turned to charter loot down to the boats. Now, as we marched in single file, eager to get clear of the forest,

they pressed and surged upon each other's heels and tore the undergrowth, cursing the delay it caused, cursing the steadiness that Jamie and I, in turn, insisted they should show, until we came quit of it all and crept out on a sandy space. Even then we had to drive them back into cover among the trees, breathing wildly, staring with bloodshot eyes across the little plain to where the town showed like a misty cloud.

4

A little white place, with flattened roofs and one great tower, I knew to be the governor's house. I could just make out the gleam of silver on the gates, and a flag above its guard-house.

The whole place seemed wrapped in profound quiet; no sound of either man or beast, no rising smoke; a place all slumberous.

I said to Jamie: "What of it? Do we take our chance on the boat's arrival? There is the first light?"

He grunted like an animal, and pulled his sleeve the higher. "They'll be astir soon; this was the hour bespoken. Drive on."

I looked at Death. He was carefully tucking away the piece of wood he had been whittling all the while we journeyed. With the one hand he fitted it into some pocket; with the other he drew his lean knife. It was extraordinary how that action moved the men. Some began to laugh and others to whistle delightedly. They began to move restlessly. To murmur and threaten. They started to chant together: "We want our breakfast! Bos'n! Pipe to it. . . ."

I said savagely: "Who's keeping you? But, by God, I'll keelhaul any man who thinks of his stomach before we clear the town. Scatter and go soft. At the gate drive in when my whistle goes."

There were some horses on the open space, and one, seeing us, kicked up his legs and ran off in alarm; and I grunted to Jamie:

"Curse the beast; if they catch us here we make damnably good targets."

But there came no sign from the gate. I turned to the man at my left. "Is the powder ready?"

He nodded. He was too breathless to speak, being a fat man but our best gunner. We were right up close to the gates, the men breathing hard, their guns already raised. We piled the powder at its edge, and I waved them all farther back. "Down flat with you! Lie there till my whistle goes! Now, gunner, here with your fuse! God's truth, this is no time for fumbling! let her have it. Back with you, back—"

We had just time to double in on our tracks and lie with the rest, when, with a roar and a crash, there went one great blaze into the air, and as it died away the first screams of hurt men. Then came a shouting: "An attack, an attack! Out guard, out Spain!"

I had my whistle between my lips, and even as the blast died away we were crashing over the broken gate. I heard Jamie shouting:

"Drive in, drive in." I heard him shouting with terrible ecstasy, "I take my drink; this for my taste—who'll challenge it?" And we were right in the very thick of the business. There came the flash of fire,

so near to my face I could feel my skin scorch, but Death had made the fellow's aim crooked, and in less than a second I was trampling on his mouth. One man went at my side, but his killer found him a snug pillow but a second later. One caught at my sword and tried to bring his pistol into play, but my blade was sharper and ripped his arm before he crooked his fingers. I caught sight of Jamie, with blood on his face, cutting and hewing his way. I caught sight of the bobbing head of Death and guessed how his nimble figure spun here and there. We were fighting up a narrow street. At the top lay the Plaza. There I chanced my meeting with the others. There, also, would be more space for sword-arm and gun. We must hurry, so I shouted again and again:

"On with you, on with you. Drive in, drive in. You'll cook 'em better in the square! Get to it, damn you; get to it!"

We heaved in like a wave on the shore, spreading out inch by inch; surging on by the very weight of our bodies. Now forward, now back; now with a great heave, now with a sudden snarl of fury. I cried again:

"Up with you, up with you! Rout 'em out; get them running."

And some one roared, "They scatter; the lousy swabs scatter."

And with a run and a roar, we had broken through and were driving them into the square.

Just as we topped it, came the sound of a trumpet, and a great cheer from the men. Just as we topped

it, I caught the red of Pascal's coat and saw his sword swinging all rainbow colors in the now full sun.

I wanted to shout back my welcome, and I did, though it was impossible he could hear. Yet he waved a salute with his sword, and I flung up my left arm in reply. A silly trick that. For a little, round, red-cheeked man with all the coolness in the world picked me out and missed me by a hair's-breadth but killed instead the gunner at my side. I pushed straight for the fellow cursing but he had slipped away. It remained for me to stick his face in my memory and make him answer for my man. For the moment that could wait. This was no easy fighting. They faced us now in the square with a fine body of men well versed in fighting, now back to back, pitting their courage and their strength against my furious men on the one side and the odd fifty on the other. They had no chance. Their leader must have known that. It was simply a case of holding on until they turned to run; they took their time before it came to that. They stood to it hotly, and so did we; they were the better shots, but our men had a handy way with sword-cut, and despite their heaviness, were quick with their feet. We lost a few, but it was pretty certain they lost each second man. I could see my father, urging his men on, having a pistol in each hand and using them with wonderful precision. I could mark Pascal with great clearness, his sword in one hand, a knife in the other, his sleeves rolled up to show his plump brown arms, his wig tossing and flying as he skipped and dodged; his lips moving continually, so

that I guessed he was singing in his usual debonair manner.

I shouted to him, "Neatly done, Pascal; well through."

And he shrilled back: "'Pon wig, pretty indeed. We will drink together ere the sun goes a-bedding."

And then some of our men joined with the others; and those poor devils, who were still untouched, turned and fled like the wind, our men hot at their heels, whooping and yelling as they gave chase.

5

Pascal came up humming and wiping his sword on some lace. "Peter dear, my heart is full of music; this is a meeting after my own taste. My belly is full of holes and my tongue as leather. But, O my Peter, what merry men and how sweet has our dancing been!"

I grinned back at him squatting on a block of stone, hot and grimed with filth, fanning myself with the kerchief from my head.

"Were they not beauties? Yet none so good as ours! How went it in the boats? For my part, I've had so many ghosts through the night, I tell you I'm plaguy glad to see the sun."

Pascal winked with great deliberation. "Ghosts! Damme, a corpse would have been gayer company than our Jacob. Not a word from his lips, not a sigh. Yet when I spoke I was but told the Lord did this, the Lord said that; and if not the Lord, that melancholy goat Wesley. Pox me, what ballast for a man to fight on!"

I laughed at him and cursed the flies, and would have gone in search of my father, but he came stalking up.

He said to Pascal: "See to it the men get all the stuff down to the river. The cellars are choked to the brim. Search there. Get you gone, and watch the men; I've set a guard with Death about the storehouse. Hark ye, that for the last. I want the goods set snug before we fill the lockers."

I saw Pascal's eyes bulge with amazement.

"'Pon wig," he squeaked, "'pon wig, a pretty game! What, do I go like a hollow tree from boat to house, and back again until I perish in the sun for this mad fancy?"

My father cut him short. "Will you forever make a god of your belly? There's plenty and more in the kitchens. Suck there with the men; lick the walls if need be; but when you've stuffed what's there, by God, no further crumb! Off with you, dog; my whistle blows our return ere noon be past."

Pascal turned away grumbling; I think he would have answered my father, but the mere mention of kitchens made him suck his lips and hurry up the Plaza, his red skirts flying, his hat at perfect angle.

I sat where I was, and my father, looking down at me, said hesitatingly, "Will you go, too?"

I cried, "Curse these mosquitoes!" and whirled my handkerchief about my head. I asked sharply, catching some meaning in his voice, "I can wait; what matter is it?"

He said slowly: "Some guest-house half-way up

the hill; empty I have it, but likely enough an excellent storehouse. Will you go search?"

I was getting very hot and angry; the place was fairly humming with mosquitoes. I whirled my handkerchief all the more; I retorted sharply: "Lucky for us if we clear away with any loot! Look at your men! So much for Death's sharp eyes! They've slipped him clean and smelt the brandy out."

The Plaza was clear of any single man, but from within the governor's house there came the sudden din of voices, a surge of movement. A sudden crash of broken glass and a great roar of laughter, followed by a pistol-shot and then another.

My father turned very white and troubled. He muttered, "Not now, O God; not at my last," and began to walk away. I called after him:

"I'll go up; empty, you say?"

He called over his shoulder, "Take men with you an you please."

I shook my head and got to my feet. "I'll trust my own wit. You'll hear my whistle if I need help." I turned away.

The square was now caught in the full blaze of sun, and over it there trembled a glimmering haze of heat. And in that shining veil—like multitudes of tiny silver spears—there massed and hung dense groups of mosquitoes. They hummed in clouds about the dead. They rushed in whirling masses from place to place, and in particular they clung to my hair and face until I sweated with heat and irritation. Why should I top this hill on some fool's chase? Always my father's

whims and fancies. Undecided I swore aloud and spun round to stare across the square. The men were running loose as I had guessed; reeling and pitching from door to door; smashing them down, fighting with each other for place, fighting inside for what they might find there. If it was stuffs of value they would be heaved to the square beneath and be pounced upon and fought over like dogs with a bone. If a woman, there would come most frantic screaming and sometimes the report of a shot. Once a girl ran like a frightened hare across the Plaza, crying aloud as she went, while there lumbered in chase a gigantic negro, naked but for a tattered cloth, his shining face seeming slit from ear to ear in one huge grin. Even at that distance I could hear his feet padding on the stones like an animal hunting.

"They've soaked themselves," I said aloud. "This will be ill for us." I stared up the hill, then down again at the rabble, and caught Pascal and my father beating about them and Death running in great long steps, a whip in his hand. I thought, "Each for each, I'll get this done," and started on. First playing a trick against those mosquitoes by making three rough slits in my handkerchief—just enough space to see and breathe—and knotting it right over my head.

The house was smaller than I thought, with a courtyard to its front. A quiet pretty place, with tubs of growing plants all bright colors, and one painted wooden balcony. I walked to the open doorway and peered in. Not a sound; dead quiet. Then I spied a door at the end. I went forward on my toes, as lightly as a cat, and when I opened it there suddenly

confronted me a nun. For some sort of reason she startled me as much as I her. She gave one frightened look, then with a flutter was about on her feet and with hands outspread, running down the further corridor, her draperies swinging about her, hardly seeming to touch the ground but rather skimming above it like a bird. She disappeared through a leather curtain which swung to behind her, swishing heavily.

I stood uncertain and frowning. "Nuns? Why, God, is the place a very haunt of papists?" Then I set to follow, still going on tiptoe, for the whole thing might be a trap, with its end behind that curtain. Just as I put my hand to it a wailing came to my ears, and as I paused a woman's voice cried:

"Quiet, quiet—"

I whispered, "English," and pushed the curtain open.

6

She was standing directly facing me with one hand outstretched upon the white wall behind her; she was dressed entirely in black lace with a mantilla about her head and shoulders; she had a rose at her bosom, and her shoes were scarlet. She was staring at me with perfect quiet and with no sign of fear. I saw her then as a reddish woman, with eyes that matched her hair and shone with tawny lights. I saw her then as something very fearless, very proud, having in her attitude something akin to a stag, watching and waiting yet moved with magnificent disdain. There was a girl crouching at her feet stifling hysterical sobbing; there

was a nun in the further corner bent over her beads. I did not notice them; I did not notice the room; I only saw this woman in black lace. And, as I stared, the whole place seemed to break away from me, the whole atmosphere die and pass. It was the old feeling, the feeling when Jamie would babble his verse of the lark, and I stood now giddy and caught up by amazement, smelling again those fields of English daisies, watching again those great red moors, seeing again the pricking deer and moving with them, part of their grace, part of their royal earth, part of the bending heather—this woman, beautiful as the dawn, shot with the sun.

I must have been tired and sick with the heat and my own amazement. I lurched against a chair, which scraped the floor and made the weeping girl cry violently; the woman bent and whispered something I did not hear; then raised her face to mine and said in the Spanish tongue:

“Well, sir? What is it? What would you do here?”

I made an effort to catch my spinning senses. I could mark clearer now the poise of her small head, the full curve to her white throat, the shadow cast on the wall by her out-flung hand. I wanted most desperately to kiss that shadow; I wanted terribly to rest my face against the cool soft dress.

She repeated impatiently, “Well, sir, have you no answer?”

I stammered, “Madam, madam . . .”

I saw her face blaze with a hidden fire. She cried:

"English? You?" The scorn in her voice stung me as salt water in a wound, and yet it made me find my tongue and say:

"Madam, you are not safe here—"

And she cut me short again: "You came to tell me that? Are you the jester of your party?"

There was a mirror on the wall just at my side. I could just glimpse myself. A fellow blooded about the arms and hands—not mine own blood; I knew that well enough. With dress dirty and torn, with powder and filth blacking my neck, a green handkerchief covering my face, and stained where it had clung by sweat to my rough skin. I looked again at her and stared about the cool quiet room. A green petticoat lay on a sofa, a pair of silken stockings and a fan; woman's things. Things I had not seen for years and had indeed forgotten: things which had no part in my life, nor ever would.

I thought of Pascal, and that riot in the square. I said most earnestly: "Madam, I beg of you let me get you quit from here! Let me at least set a guard about this house."

She said: "I want no guard, neither will I go. Do you think I would ask you for protection? Do you think I would be led by you to any safer place?"

I said: "I'll not stay. But my men, some of them."

She laughed. "Your rabble!" she said. "I do not know whether you are such a knave and rogue as to be counted worse than your kind. I do not know if this

is some deep-laid trap; but this is my house for the while, and I need it, sir, for myself."

I cried out: "Madam, you cannot think me viler than I know myself to be, but I implore you, let me get you out beyond the town to some safer place." I cried in desperation: "You do not know then when they break loose; I cannot hold them back. This is a chance; I beg you will not miss it."

She said, "Again I tell you, this is my house."

I flung my hands imploringly. "Will you make it too late?"

She did not notice me. She shook the mad kneeling girl and cried sharply, "Tina! enough of this; get me my cloak." She turned to me. "Well, sir?" She came a quick step forward and cried furiously, "Sir, I would change my dress."

I had no time to answer or to protest. There came the sound of a shot close at hand; then another. I turned and went out to the courtyard.

My father stood there, a smoking pistol in his hand, two men with him, very sober to my surprise. Another was dead. My father looked at me and nodded. I saw there was a sharp glint in his eyes and a fierce turn to his jaw. He said harshly:

"A vile mutinous dog." He kicked the body contemptuously and jerked the pistol into his belt. "Any find in there?"

I said dully, "Nothing." I added, "A lady and her servant."

He did not appear to notice. He said shortly: "We

must get quit of here with no delay. An Indian reports Spaniards but an hour off up the hills." He spread his hands out with sudden humility. "The Lord presses me down harshly, yet it is His business, not mine."

I shouted: "Spaniards? How many?"

He shrugged contemptuous shoulders. "Does it matter? An inland trading center newly formed. We must drive out with no hesitation."

I cried: "And half the men drunk! My God, this is indeed a sorry plight."

He retorted: "You must be their bait. Hark ye, Peter, I told you once I have a hazard on this matter; no Spaniard shall put me off! We're stuffing the boats now; a while and we'll be clear; then if their friends come hunting you lead them. In the forest it will be easy pricking if you hold your wits. Once we start up the river we're safe; they cannot follow. We'll make a bonfire of their canoes."

I said, "Is there a man or half a man can use his legs?"

My father snapped his fingers viciously. "There'll be enough. For the rest—drive them on! Use whips and ropes and blade and flog them on! And if they trip, let them lie so; I'll have no stretchers for soused fools. We take the wounded in the boats."

It was then I noticed she had come to the doorway and stood there staring at our little group, and beyond that to where the dead man lay dotted about with flies.

We were to get away from this place, and I wanted to speak to her again. We would be gone from it in

less than an hour. In less than a night there would be no sign of us for miles distant; in less than two days I would be back on the ship and all this nothing but a dead past dream.

I wanted to speak to her again, because I wanted to be sure of her voice in the dread years that were likely to be counted out as mine. I wanted to go close to her, to hold the memory of her face as a man will carry a torch to light his darkness.

I crossed over; I said slowly: "Lady, we will be gone from here within the hour. You will be safe; your friends are coming from the hills.

She said, "So you run." She laughed and said: "Your men do not fight when the attack is on them; they slink in like rats in the night. Once there is noise abroad, they show their tails and scatter." She laughed again. "Lord! There is some humor to it."

I retorted: "Madam, you are hard. We serve no nation, no king, no God! But has either country, king, or God made all men above reproach?"

She looked at me curiously. "That as you will; but I have thought men—" she weighed upon the word—"men did not let their drink make runaways of them."

I said: "They would do much when they were thirsty, when they were hungry. Yet I am sorry—"

She cried: "For what? Because your fine fellows cannot stand but must be carried? For this—this indignity?" She looked at my father, still talking with our boatswain. She pointed to the dead man, and the droning flies about his body.

I said dully, "Yes, and for other things." I thought:

"You can never know how deep, how hideous is my sorrow. You can never know how I, who have been scarred by many wounds, stand now cut by such a sword that I shall feel its twist, its rasp, until the patient grass meets over me and lulls the pain."

Odd then my feeling. So to look from her toward my father. So to think: "Now the screw twists, and you have made it so. You are my cause; this is my birthright." So to remember standing there. "*When you learn love, then will you learn hatred.*" So much for prophecy. Had he ever doubted, then he must have seen it written in my eyes as he turned suddenly and faced me. The thing was born in that short space of time.

And yet he only called: "We go as before. I take Pascal, Jamie with you." He said sharply, "This is your trick, Peter; see to it you work it well."

I answered dully, "Why, yes, what else is there I could do?"

He looked at me sharply, and asked curiously: "Eh, what is it? Is the sun over-hot?"

I muttered, "My head maybe." I said savagely, "Not your affair; not yours for once."

He stared at me very closely, yet said not a word, merely turning away with a shrug.

It was then I noticed the round-faced man who had marked so well our gunner in the street. He was crouching just in the door beside the lady, half hidden in the dim corridor, half by her dress. I saw him idly at first, then remembering poor Allen's death with quick interest. Then seeing how close he knelt beside

her, I made to turn away. The whole matter might have ended there, when the glint of steel caught my eye and I realized in a flash he had his gun ready and was aiming deliberately at my father. To shout him warning was too risky, to draw my pistol too slow. I had a trick from Death much quicker in its result; I used it now. Slipping loose my knife, I flung it clean and straight. It caught the fellow in the pit of his throat and spun it clean to the hilt. I heard his teeth click together as he sprawled in a heap. I heard an exclamation from the woman, saw her cast one look at me that made me fling my hands before my face as if to hide it.

I heard my father calling: "Peter, Peter, will you sleep?"

And I was lurching after him, whispering over and over: "Done murder before her, shown her my quality, shown her my bloody hands. Yet for my father! She will never know—my father."

CHAPTER IX

I

I WAS stumbling down the hill into the square, slipping on the stones, dizzy in the sun. I could hear my father give final instructions. I was bawling orders myself; I was tearing at a piece of meat some one handed me, drinking from a broken bottle. All these things I did as I had done for years past, yet I was a dreamer trapped in a dream which held me still by its very amazement. I was a sleeper, shaken suddenly to wakefulness by all the noise of every-day life, yet staring back across the borderland as, in a foreign port, a man will stare upon a ship pointing for home.

The square seemed packed with fighting-maddened men who raged and whooped and danced; who spun like tops, their naked bodies flashing in the sun; who ran from house to house, and, finding nothing, smashed at the very walls and in some cases set the place ablaze. And all the while we beat them toward the street; we formed a line clean round them of nine sober men and forced them on; we lashed them from the back with great hide whips until some howled like beasts, and others broke away screaming their defiance and paid for it by pitching in a lumpish sodden heap where yet a second before they had reeled their time away.

Intervals—and I would hear a voice—my voice:

"Cut them down if need be; get hell into them. Ah, you dogs, you 'll lap too often one day! March, will ye? March, damned scum."

Intervals—and I would be whispering: "That 's it! Set about your business. That 's it; get on with it. She 's not for you; she 's not your life; *this is*. Drive to it now; drive to it, fool."

We were wedged now in the street, packed in a tight, heaving mass; it looked as if our outer line had held at last. I know I shouted to the boatswain, "Once quit of it all, they 'll settle."

And he answered grimly, "Once they feel a Spanish pike, their senses 'll get free enough!"

They were getting reason of a kind as it was; it had been hammered into them with oaths and snarls from others.

"Sell us, will ye? Pitch us to the Spaniards to be carved down? I 'll carve your bloody face the first!"

It had been stung into their flesh by that thin devilish thong whirled by Death, sent coiling about a man's body to leave him shrieking, with a narrow red curve twining like a ribbon about his skin. It was dinned into their oafish ears by his terrible fiendish laugh as he would twist upon some recreant and cut him back to place.

So at the end of the street they were shambling along in some kind of order; they were breaking out over the plain toward the forest, fumbling with unsteady fingers at their guns and giving at least a little hope they would make a stand against the Spanish if they caught us up.

It was as I ran at last across the battered gateway a sudden cry made me start, and I peered about.

A thin moaning cry, right at my very side it seemed: "Help, help! For th' love of God!"

I thought, "Were there other English in this town?" Yet I think I would have passed on had not a sudden idea made me push about the ruins until, right behind a block of stone, I found a man all bloodied about the face, breathing most horribly, his eyes half closed. I bent to him, and heard his whisper:

"Water, water; I be dying—water—water!"

I had little heed for his torment. Water! I would drain the place if he could but answer me one thing; I wrenched the stopper from my bottle and pressed it to his lips; I cried aloud:

"Here man, here! Drink it down, steady, steady—something I want you to tell me; something I want to know . . ."

He whimpered: "Oh, zur, oh, zur, I be dreadful cold, oh, zur, oh, zur."

I said impatiently: "The English lady at the guest-house, who is she? Answer me, man; drink again; drink again! Who is she? Quick, quick."

The water gurgled from his mouth; he could hardly swallow. His whole body seemed to jerk with convulsions; his face showed now most dreadful despair. Yet he must have heard me, for he gasped:

"My mistress. Ben Witchen, that's me; good Zumerset name."

I put my lips right to his ear. I cried despairingly:

"Not yours, fool; not yours. Her name, she you call mistress; try, try."

He groped one hand up to his throat. He muttered: "I be choking. 'T is mighty hard . . . Lynden, Lynden, from where I be, Plover's . . ."

The rattle in his throat seemed to shake his whole body. He jerked to his side and lay there very still.

From behind the town came a distant shot; then another nearer in; then a thin bugle-note. I was running over the plain to the forest, pitching on my feet like a drunken man, shaken with a most tremendous ecstasy.

2

It was Jamie I wanted. I could not get him then. He was in front; mine was the rear job. It needed all my patience, all my care, not to burst through and shout my greeting in his ears, and shout my questions, breathless for his answer. I had to wait. I had to wait. And even then I knew there was so very little I would dare to say.

Sorrel, Sorrel! So he had called her, and I had never given the name one second thought. There could not be two women with such a name.

Red earth, red heather, red deer. Jamie's Sorrel. How had she come here all these miles? What was she doing in this foreign place? And yet, if chance had not an oddly jesting way, I might have searched through English lanes in vain and never known of her. It needed all this alien land, it needed all my

heaped-up bloody years, before I could look upon her face which had been neighbor to me once and I not known it.

Some noise behind me, and I had spun around pistol in hand. A stealthy cracking of undergrowth, and surely a gleam of steel. My whistle pierced the silence; I let them hear it three times.

I cupped my mouth and shouted so that Jamie could hear: "Get ready! But go steady to the first opening; keep powder till then!"

I thought, "If they attack—" There came a spurt of fire just behind, which merely scorched a tree and made me laugh grimly. "Some one has lost his temper; they should show better manners." Then we were gathered in a biggish clearing, and I shouted:

"Now 's the time if any. Quick with fire, and back all the time . . . Wait for them; wait, dogs! Now, now—answer!"

There were men breaking from the edge of the trees, and I noticed few had guns; nearly all had pikes or swords. We let fly with one blaze of powder, then doubled on into the forest without waiting to see the result, then blazed out again. But they were hot, those Spaniards; and for the few they were, they did a silly thing. Right into the trees they closed with us until we fought their pikes with cutlass and knife, with sword and fist. They had a trick, I think, to get us back to the open and keep us there until the rest came up and pass us to get down to the sea and catch the boats if need be.

They nearly did the thing. Our men were burnt and

maddened by their drinking. One of them now being killed, another most dreadfully wounded by a pike; his frantic screaming, and the dead man's body went to their heads as much as any Spanish wine. They took no heed of order; they had no need then for any caution. Like a wolf-pack they were about and on that band of men, massing against them with sullen fury, silent, but breathing with dreadful intensity, jabbing and cutting, shooting and wrestling. Where one man fell another would take his place; where one was wounded one would push him aside and finish his business for him. Jamie was with them from the very first. Death I never saw; I was the only man who tried to keep them steady, but for my part I had enough to do with my own sword.

Then we were suddenly in the forest again, tramping on. There was perfect stillness behind us, and one might listen in vain for any stirring of the undergrowth. I never remember yet what happened to our wounded.

I found myself beside Jamie. He was in his most drunken devilish state; his eyes shone very red; his coat had gone and his shirt hung in rags.

I said to him: "That near cost our lives! Good luck they were but half a hundred men—there must be others; we would have been cooked had they come up."

He swung his red blade and cut away a great creeper. He said hoarsely: "What matter if there came twice one hundred? It does the stomach good to work so."

I cried impatiently, "You would be easy for their spitting, if you will play the ass." I added moodily, "I think we have been fooled. What if they break in

hundreds at the river's mouth? A pretty trap. 'Fore God, I see this a most bloody picnic."

He swayed and crashed heavily to his knees and rose swearing loudly. "This hell-gone muck!" He kicked the tangled grasses viciously. "Trying to trip me up." He kicked again. "And I'm as parched as a thousand suns; I would drink cider—" He stopped and suddenly glared at me. "What ye say cider for?"

I retorted roughly: "'T was yourself. Get on with it, Jamie. Plague take you, we shall turn roots if you dawdle here all day."

He said suspiciously, "What know ye of cider?"

I snarled, "I never mentioned it; on, man!"

He lumbered on, silent and vacant in the face, yet eyeing me from time to time as if I had been the cause of some conspiracy.

I shouted at him once, "Don't gape at me, fool."

And he turned his head away with a little sigh which touched me despite his drunken foolishness.

It was when we had marched far into the next day and still strode on—seemingly in safety, for there came no sound for alarm—I said to Jamie, now lumbering like a sheep, uttering no sound but breathing loudly:

"Jamie, once you spoke of Sorrel. Tell me again."

I could hear him muttering, "Sorrel, Sorrel?"

I said as gently as I could, "It was a name, you said; whose name?"

He kept on as before: "Sorrel, Sorrel? Pretty I call it. Aye, an' likable; what of it, eh?"

I said: "That's for you to tell; you know it; you spoke of it. Red, it means; is n't that so?"

He jerked his sword from one shoulder to the other.

"Red! A good word that! Red; curse me, I like the word! Prettier than—what's it? Sorrel you name—but red! A lucky tone to it. 'Fore God."

I could have shaken him. I shouted, exasperated: "Nay, but a woman's name! Sorrel, Sorrel!"

He mused upon it. "Eh, I have it now. Sorrel, meadow-grass. It grows thin and high and cheeky in the woods and in the grass. Sorrel. What made you think on it?"

I said, "Nothing, nothing."

He mumbled: "Things are too dim. Never drink, Peter; it makes things dim. I never know if it be best they should stand so or clear and brightly. What think ye, eh?"

I muttered, "I do not know."

He went on, "Yet you remember Sorrel, eh?"

I said: "Yes, oh, yes. And I would to God you could remember also."

He shook his head and muttered beneath his breath something I could not hear. He said aloud, with a great effort at steadiness:

"There I slip. Yet I like the word; it smells sweet!"

I whispered, "It is sweet."

He nodded vacantly. He said, "I'm glad of that; it's the sweetness that tells, if ye've the way to remember afterward." He added: "I was never one for memory. I was the losing one; I lost it all."

I cried with a sudden burst of grief: "Ah, so did I, Jamie; so did I! There is nothing left, nothing."

He said timidly: "What, you? Ay, that's bad. Sorrel; was that lost to ye?"

I said with an effort, "That was lost, Jamie."

He shook his head dolefully: "Why, that's bad; that's bad. Lost, eh? Yet there's the sweetness."

I whispered, "Yes, the sweetness."

Then we marched out upon the plain.

3

When we marched out upon the plain and sensed again the distant sea, we were as sorry a band that sacked a town as one could fancy. We stumbled out across the bog and sand, bleeding, bruised, and sick at heart; each with some bitter thought, each with some sullen fury burning like a fever. One man would lurch against his fellow, and the other would turn on him spitting like a cat about to spring; one man might groan or mutter with the pain, and if he did it noisily you could mark his neighbor fingering for his knife. Once a man fell, and roared he would not move, and sobbed and shrieked and showed his naked feet as raw and bloody as a lump of beef. It was his comrades who answered him, who fell upon him—like a herd upon one wretched beast—and shook him to his legs and bashed and cut at him and made him limp yelping like a dog at their head, nor let him lag one step behind, until he suddenly pitched clean dead, when with one accord they scrambled for his pockets, then left him there to stagger on themselves in sullen silence.

I thought, "By God! there will be a villainous end to this unless the boats have got the loot in safe."

I thought: "Now, damn me, what were those Spaniards up to? Did they follow down the river? Will they stand against us, then?"

As if to answer me, there came the sound of shooting, then the sullen roar of our gun—once, twice, three times. I whispered, "There speaks some racket!"

I shouted, "Drive to it, ye gulls; drive to it! There goes your treasure."

Foot it they could when they were pricked to it; nor would they stop. As when they turned to bite up in the forest, so that distant firing and thought of all the plunder set them now crashing and cursing and panting over the ground. As we topped a ridge we could just make out sudden quick jets of fire, and like a great green star the lantern of *The Five Wounds*. As we pitched the nearer in we could hear the shout of voice upon voice, the clash of steel, the shuffling of many feet.

I cried: "Easy now, easy! Get your breath." And got them standing. I cried, "In with you, boys!" And they broke to the beach.

Each minute it was getting darker, and in the confusion it was difficult to make matters out. One thing I could see, and it made me stare and bite my lip. Nearly every second man was a Spaniard, and my heart sank when I thought of the temper of my men and how ill a business this was likely to be if we lost now. Yet my father had put his finger to a plan which might not do so badly. Slow up the river's mouth out to our ship went the boats, guarded in turn by those who had been waiting with the ship. Others there were pressed

waist-high into the water, now in turn pressing back upon the beach, who fought most desperately to let those boats go free.

There was a certain horror in that fighting. No moon. But men—from our side or theirs I did not know—running hither and thither with torches and lanterns. And in this dim uncertain light we grappled with those long, lean Spanish soldiers for every boat-load of loot they tried to force from us and we from them. A frightful business. Wounded men sucked out by the sea, dead men flung high up the beach by the surf, only to be caught and dragged in again. Some body of them got out to one boat, and I could see high above their heads a great jeweled cross, now up, now down; now bent this way, now carried with a rush nearly to the shore, only to be grappled with and tossed back to the boat again. Some three or four, more daring than the rest, surged past and out to another; and in the tumult which followed the thing tipped over and the sea seemed full of choking, fighting men and floating chests and wondrous bales of stuffs. And all the while there was Pascal singing:

“In Amsterdam there lived a maid.
Mark well what I do say.”

And, “Ah!” he would chuckle; “now, dog, will you push so? This for thy manners:

“I put my arm around her waist.

Says she, ‘Young man, you’re in great haste . . .’”

Now he broke off to cry: "I have liked a sweeter scent than thy breath. This is a most unpleasant rascal. Curse me, what a stubborn skin! Yet, as I thought, my blade will always find an opening.

"I'll go no more a-roving with you, fair maid.

"Now, see, my Peter, the wisdom in a song; that little bearded fellow could have no prettier epitaph. Ah, pig, would you? My best waistcoat. Then pox take your villainous nose."

I cried to him: "There goes the whistle. Ready for the boats!"

Said Pascal. "These rogues are bent on staying us."

I cried, "Here come the boats!" I shouted again and again: "Stand for the boats; put your hearts to it! Now! In with you, in with you."

They were out after us, swimming, I think, some of them; they were being cut down from the sides as they grappled with the rowers; I missed Jamie, but saw him higher up whirling his great sword, and heard a scream that cut the air with a shriller note than any whistle.

Two men were fighting in the sea, quite near to where I knelt with my pistol, and both went down cursing and locked together. Some one was chanting over and over:

"We've got the loot; we've got the loot! No boys like us; we've got the loot."

And we were well out with *The Five Wounds* looming up like a great black shadow, her decks swarming with dancing, singing men, her lights flaming from

stern to bow; and I could see Pascal at my side squatting like a fat frog, bearing upon his hand a pair of silken slippers, crooning to himself:

"Ah, pretty, pretty! So soft, so rare, so delicate! but what would I not give to have seen the sweetness that scented them?"

And then I was mounting up the side, suddenly very sick and very tired.

4

Five hours later, and all the strife had passed: A soft wind was bearing us out and away.

My watch, and I stood high upon the poop staring through the darkness, behind which lay hidden Santa Verde, where now must sleep Sorrel Lynden. There was a great quiet on the ship; there had been ever since our men had drunk and filled themselves again, and now lay all about the deck, heaped and huddled, some with bottles still in their hands, others sprawled like great starfish, and each man fighting again and drinking again in his uneasy sleep.

When we got back! Would the night lift before we lost the land entirely? Would the dawn come too late for me to see again that land, to mark again the forest and know behind it lay my dream?

How had this thing come about, that all my soul should stir and move because of one woman's face? How had this thing come about that I had marched so far down the years, and seen my star too late, to anchor my poor ship behind it? Eskdale had talked of love, and I had wondered. Now did that same trum-

pet make its music in my ears, and I must listen; listen and make no answer; listen and let its challenge pass and die.

I thought, "No, never die!" I thought: "I shall have closed with love once in my life, though she will never know it. I shall stand solitary and desolate; pass down the years alone, I and my secret."

Solitary and desolate. That for me! That was my gain. Out of this reckless, hurrying, blackguardly life, there would come nothing; only my own shadow to follow, only the sound of my own stumbling feet, only the agony of my own desolation.

So much for romance, so much for adventure! The thing was cracked and split across as is a mirror, and I was staring at the splinters, yet knowing it must be with these fragments that I must continue.

Wonderfully still now the night; wonderfully quiet the sea. Just one timid star, pale in its glimmer, shrunken in against that vast black canopy.

I could hear the mutter of my father's voice, droning through the open skylight. Of all these sleeping men he alone was awake reading or praying.

"They that go down to the sea in ships,
That do business on great waters;
These see the works of the Lord,
And his wonders in the deep."

I turned away and walked to the side of the ship. "*Wonders in the deep.*" What had I seen? Tumult and storm; peace of waters and mystery of great space;

ships passing and going; traffic and gain; the vanity of many men; the pride of uncharted seas.

"*Wonders in the deep!*" What had I known? Many things; bloody things; wanton destruction, and most violent brawling. Honor torn to shreds; base deeds and baser thoughts.

What had I seen? . . . A woman's face.

BOOK TWO

CHAPTER I

I

HOW is it possible a woman's face can haunt you so? I, who had rejoiced in freedom, now went in bonds; not even sleep gave me release; always her face, wonderful and wise, before me. Why had this thing happened? This was a shame beyond enduring, that I had looked into a woman's eyes, which made me cover mine. And I could not forget, neither could I continue the old life remembering it.

I would go back. If I was mad once I would be madder still. If I had taken risks, I would now play such a hazard as I had not dared to think upon even when listening to Eskdale. I would go back; and more than that, I would find out Plover's Cove. Much had been mine in life, only this I prayed; where moved her shadow, there might I hold my dream in such a quiet that it could not slip from my keeping.

I used to think: how if the child known to Jamie was not the woman seen by me? Fool to waste words and patience with Jamie! How he would babble and I listen, half crazy with despair at such vacant talk, yet not daring to press him too closely for fear even he might turn suspicious. I would try and ease my distress with memories of that dying fellow at Santa

Verde; he, too, had spoken her name, her town— Red heather, red earth, red deer. Not two of such likeness!

And then again, suppose she now lived in this New England? Suppose she and hers forever had left Somerset? I might risk much, but I could not dare even to make my start with questionings along this coast, much less to search so near, once I had left the ship. There must be sea and oceans of it behind me, if I would run without pursuit. I knew from Pascal the unwillingness there had been that once, when my father had sailed the brig to Bristol. I could imagine their state while they had been in harbor; they would have sailed without him had it not been for Death. I had a chance against their cunning once I was set in England; but I had none, and well I knew it, if I remained in America. There was no help to it; I could do nothing until I reached Plover's Cove. Gossips could tell me there all I would know. If she had gone, why, then, there would be earth once trodden by her, air she had breathed, much her dear eyes had chanced upon. Who was I to desire more? Rather be thankful for that much so little deserved.

2

These were the things that fretted, not thought of risk. How mad the men might turn once they had found me gone; how mad an end mine own might be was there still a warrant for me on old Bride's death in Bristol! Such things I knew well enough. Yet they did not hinder. Mine was a desperate cause

not to be stayed, except for one thing: there was my father. And even when my hopes were at their highest, I knew one thing: I could not leave him living. Hate him I might, but I could not be his murderer. I knew the quality of the men; if I left him now he would be easy prey for them to turn upon. Old, and near to feebleness, they'd give no thought to me but force the passage of the shoals from him; and having learned it—what use to them a doddering, white-haired fanatic?

I used to shun him in those days. I used to turn my back and walk the poop alone; I used to closet close with Pascal and Jamie, or play chess by the hour with Death rather than risk a moment in his company. Yet at table I would stare fascinated by my own hate. Stare and think:

"I must remember I am part of you; how big a part?"

I used to think:

"I have walked step by step with you all these years back. How can I check my stride? Is it too late?"

I would remember:

"Once a woman's face made you turn for a while, then turn again and break her heart."

I would pray:

"But this is different, God; this is different."

And I would go on deck and sit hunched up right forward in vain effort to shut away my sudden panic, seeking to fight the thing with hope, with courage. Only to hear the ceaseless murmuring as of the sea:

"One blood, one blood, one blood."

In spite of everything, my father knew. Once after dinner he stayed me when I would have followed Jamie and said with great thought:

“So it has turned to hate at last, Peter?”

I came back into the cabin and closed the door.

“You should not question me.”

He bunched his brows and stared at me reflectively. “Why hide the thing?”

I said, watching him, “You are my father!”

He beat with his fist meditatively on the table. “How the word pinches, eh, Peter?” he said with great soberness. “Here is love.”

I answered steadily, “Yes—”

He frowned a little, pulling at his loose red lip.

“The thing grows hot; the chain pulls.” He shrugged and turned into his own room.

And it was only some few days after this that the first link broke. We fell in with an English man-o'-war who hailed us, desiring to put on board; a matter of little importance at other times, for we had a way of bluffing any navy jack, but which at that instant would have bred much mischief. Only a while past we had rounded up a merchantman and stripped her well; now we were smothered round with litter and not over clean; we could do nothing but disobey that signal. There followed a running fight, when she raked us with her broadside before we got away and killed six men and wounded four, among whom was my father. It was then as I bent to pick him up, he whispered:

“Now plume your wings; your time is not so far.”

3

Odd how he lingered for so old a man. His was a strength which neither fever nor a stubborn wound could wear away. And all this while—he showed no weakness until the spring of the new year—he would not leave the ship. Not even go ashore at Isola Sound; no matter how long we sojourned, he stayed aboard. If he had had power with the men before, in these last months he held them so they worked like men in amazement. I think they thought him filled with some uncanny strength, for they had known men less hurt than he, yet so full of pain that they could do no more than groan their grievances and rot like fruit. Yet here was my father thrice the age of any one of them, crippled but quick to reason, cunning as ever when cunning was needed. A man who four times put us on the track of treasure and four times from his chair on the poop saw to its business. And so they kept well forward and watched with curious eyes, and when he put the chance their way leaped out like wolves, then hung about waiting their leader's praise.

And all this while I made my face a mask to cheat the rest, and stared behind it with aching, passionate eyes, longing to break away, straining to see my star.

And he knew; he knew. I used to think with bitterness, I could not even lock my heart from those great pricking eyes, I could not even chain my thoughts, but he must stretch and touch his fingers on each one of them as if my face was but an open book and he the reader. And as he knew and guessed my mind, I used to wonder what held him back from making it broad

knowledge through the ship; an easy way to end the bitterness, an easy way—I used to think—to stop my madcap dreaming with all its wild plans and give me solace of a sweeter kind than it was possible I could reach hold of in this life.

And yet nothing happened and nothing passed between us excepting matters to do with the ship. Then one night, when I smoked near him in my watch, when the stars burned through the darkness like a multitude of eyes, and the sea moved grave and still as a bending trembling field of violets, he said softly:

“You will be loose ere the summer is passed; there is a patience to ye, I mark with gratitude.”

I said harshly: “Ah, let the thing be! We do but drift in talk. Have we not gone far enough, you and I?”

He said, not heeding me! “Different ways, different ways. You for the flare, I for the quiet.”

I peered through the gloom to where the helmsman slacked indifferent at the wheel.

“You should have let me be in Bristol, then. You were the thief; you made the tangle.”

He moved in his chair so the light wrap held about him fell away, and I could see how much the skeleton he seemed of late.

He retorted grimly: “Ye have a sharp humor, Peter; I’m remembering when the word ‘kidnapped’ clipped your mouth. You show a lively measure with your tongue.”

I cried impatiently: “What boots it? Why should we make pretense with pretty words? The thing is

done; the trick is over; we start out afresh, you and I."

I thought he stared at me oddly, yet the light was too bad to make clear his expression. He said slowly, "The old story; father and sons, father and sons." He asked suddenly, "Why did ye not foot it out o' this before?"

I stared at him amazed. "Why, 'fore God, this is a waste of time."

He taunted, "Love o' women!" He laughed. "You would not dangle on a rope's end at the gibbet at Bristol Gate and hurt the eyes of that sweet lady, your aunt; but ye must walk back now straight into the loop, all for some pretty face! What fool is this? Is reason turned to salt?"

I said thickly, "Now stay your tongue! or if you are thinking 'Father and son,' by God, forget it; for there is a time when much is forgotten."

He said coolly: "Nay, use not threats; listen, fool. Eight years is but the span of a hand to laws and warrants and men left killed. You may not go to Bristol; what matter that to me? You may grow a beard and dodge from corner to corner with your love; I do not care. But I am a dying man, and I will rid me of this much before I sink. Hark ye, I told you once I wrote a letter to your aunt?"

I said grimly, "Well, what of it?"

"This much! there was some purport in that note that cleared that neck of yours."

I leaned very close to him. "What did you write?"

He said shortly: "Who killed and why; and nailed it to the castle walls. Faith! It made a lively tale."

I put my hand out to steady myself. "Why not this before?"

He answered carelessly, "I waited for ye to question."

I cried out in agony, "That was not fair."

He retorted, "Fair enough as between father and son." He said grimly: "You never asked; why should I tell? I waited." He paused, and I let him speak. "Waited till ye set eyes on my ship, till ye let the sea sink into your nostrils, till the life—my life—crept in, and ye answered. Tush, boy, why kick against it? I knew the night we met in Bristol; there was a gleam to your eyes, a tone to your voice, a look to your face that only the sea can start there. You saw the ship; had I given you what I had written, would you have gone back then?"

I said hoarsely: "I am no liar. But you, who call yourself a man of prayer, tell me this: why should God move so darkly and let my passions drift so bloodily and clog my eyes with so much falseness until it takes a woman to clear my vision and let me see myself and all my days as something soiled and vile, hideous and beneath contempt?"

There came a red look into his eyes, and he strained with his hands on the chair.

"It is not comely to speak so. God—" He paused and licked his lips and made as if to speak and could not, and then cried with an effort: "God has seen fit to use me as His tool. I answer to God. To women—man is but a fool to bow his neck to women."

I said, "Let me be the fool then, for I have much

to learn yet, and I have learned nothing from God or the sea."

He cried, "I could break you now if I gave but the word!" He seemed suddenly to sink in his chair, and he said slowly: "There, there, it is done. God has a way of smoothing tongues. Learn as you may, I have finished."

He seemed to sink then into a kind of stupor, neither did he wake from it until the sun was high in the sky. He did not speak to me again nor any man, but once or twice he moaned and gabbled unintelligible words. Just before he died he called out very loud, so that some of the men came stumbling to the poop ladder and peered from there. I think he knew us then. He said quite steadily:

"Now lay me flat, clean to the deck, and hasten with it."

And we laid him out so that he rested there, his hands both touching the flat wood. And he commanded again:

"Now hark ye! When I am put overboard let me be naked so my body may nestle in immediately; let me go face downward so my lips may be the first to kiss the salt. I would not be trammeled; I would go out and down as a ship may slip gently to her moorings."

And by noon, with the sun very hot, he was let down the side, and the sea pressed over him and held him close.

So the matter was over, and the man who went as the buccaneer of God and gloried in it struck out on

his final voyage and sailed west. While we gave answer to the wind, and to the beat of our shaking sails rode through the sun-tipped waves. Forgetting, heedless of that wild spent soul, now from its trappings free, to hunt unfulfilled desire in other lands; to rush through space as once his ship had run, hot for the chase. Until a pitying God put thumbs upon those restless eyes and bade him look afresh on hands and feet all bloody from the cross and understand.

3

‘That night we had much riot; much music and singing; much drink and noise. I was their captain, and they toasted me as such; toasted me with cries of, “Young blood! This for our leader; and this and this and this!” Until the crew swept into the cabin and made free the deck; until there was much stink of wine and smash of glass; until light came to challenge our disorder, and yet they kept at it. Danced to the scraping of the fiddle, and fought and laughed and bawled so that sea-birds screeched their fear and stretched their wings in further flight. On into the day, and then in one final madness soaked our flag in goat’s blood and spun it to the top, where it leaked in great red drops to the sails and deck below. Then held their glasses to it, and held them out to me, until the noise of sea and ship was lost in their drunken bawlings.

“This for young blood. This for a young, strong heart! This for a spicy wind and a heaping cargo! Salue! Salue! Salue!”

And all this while I kept my mask. I made a bluff

with all my doings; I held my patience as a dog will hold a bone, and not my deepest grief could drag it from me then. I was their leader; they called me captain, hung upon my word, made shift to please me in their clumsy way, and looked in turn for adventure full to the brim and hot with recklessness. I was their chief, my father's son, my father's blood, and bitten so with all his ways and cunning, yet younger. They could not think of idleness but pushed about like reckless hungry beasts eager to hunt, sniffing this way and that, up wind and down wind, tiptoe with impatience to be loose, out and away. I gave them lead. That was my cunning, that was my plan. I gave them meat, juicy and full of taste, as they desired. I gave them everything and more, as they had had with my father. If they had any thought to watch me in those days, I put them off the track and hid my inner man with such skill to make them confounded and delighted at the audacity of their dead leader's son.

In such a time I did not dare to think of her. Or, if I did, my head would bow in shame that such as I could let her face pass between mine and all the racket of my graceless life; or, if I did, I stood aghast at my own insolence. I saw myself no more than one dyed red from head to foot, yet stretching out those same red hands to grope uncertain, desperate, to where, in dim obscurity, there moved my dream.

Only at night I dared remember. Only when all my world lay snug at peace, I could stare through the darkness and see again her fearless eyes stare back at mine; and see the shadow of her arm outflung against

that cool white wall, the gallant poise of her proud head, the courage of her voice. And think of her remote, far off; a pale dim figure, separated from me, as one land from another, by troubled seas, by vast immeasurable space.

Then I believed my bitterness toward my dead father, grew rather than diminished—when I remembered how, for his cause, I had killed right before her, how, for his life, I had put the final touch to my vile quality as seen by her. She would go through life thinking of that uncouth fellow who blundered into her very presence and spattered her floor with filth and blood. She would have talk for that same man who covered up his face for very shame and murdered at her side, with no more thought than had he killed a fly. Why talk of reverence toward the dead? Why hide the thing? Why blush for very shame of it that the living child could hate the dead parent? Life had been easy for him, death a good finish. He with God's name to cover up his shame, he with the insolence of all that ranting kind to stalk humanity and hush its villainy beneath much prayer! Lucky for him! Wonderful achievement! And then to die, to pass away and make an end to it, while I moved on; to mock me dead as he had mocked me living; to win again as he had won at Bristol! To leave me in this hideous tumult, solitary, his own hands having thrust me there! I used to wonder was there not much humor hidden away beneath that iron face which could conceive so supreme a jest?

But most of all I think I hated him for his idea of

God. For the image he had made and offered out to me, for the beauty I had lost, and which he had stripped of all wisdom. He had broken me, my life and my God; he had toppled both before me with one turn of his wrist, with one word of his mouth. What matter that he was now dead and I living? He had everything; for the dead have all. I had nothing but a dream, a wistful feeling that close to its presence I might find shelter. How possible to find that shelter without God, without truth?

I could not get away from his God. Once or twice I had tried to fight the thing with him; he would answer from the Bible. And even as my father spoke, seemingly, it was written there. Who was I to dispute God's mouth?

No help, then, it would seem from God; no help from that great charging majesty who spun mankind as lightly as a man may spin a ball, and with as little thought, headlong together, and left them then to do His bidding with hideous clash and frightful carnage. So spoke my father's God; so spoke the prophet's God; and hearing both, so was my God lost to me.

But Christ—my father never spoke of Christ. It was not expected he would. There was a trumpet in the cry of God that echoed in my father's brain and made him move as one inspired and answering to that mighty chord. But Christ! Christ walked with men, talked with them, ate and drank, loved children, touched sinners, gave friendship. Christ wept; God would not weep. Christ died; God would not die. Too low, too simple this Christ for my father. I had

forgotten much of all my Bible days, but I had seen a man once crucified. An Indian; we had come upon him once when we put in for water. He was a signal left by the Spaniards; when we came up he hung agape and dead, his face all flies, his body torn. We were bad enough, the lot of us, vile in our ways, shocking in our killing. Yet even the worst turned white and sick and stood about and swore and shuffled in that helpless state men will do; we cut the fellow down and dug him in the sand and went on singing. That was our way. Yet afterward I thought of that man's face and saw it dimly as Christ's.

Easy to think the thing out; easy to picture the difference. A body tearing on those sharp long nails, a head bent so that the muscles strained and ached, so the sun beat upon the blood-stained face and head, where thick, jagged thorns bit and cut into the flesh, and insects hummed and stung and stuck to the matted hair. Spirit that would not die, heart that would struggle on, soul that would not break till the hour struck. A multitude of faces peering upward, distorted with laughter, gaping with curiosity, dancing with mockery. A spitting bawdy mob. Peddlers, soldiers, travelers, priests, and beggars, women and children surging about the cross, reaching for stones, passing and repassing. Staring, each one of them, up at that face always bent down to them. Drink for the man who hangs there. Drink for that blackened, knotted tongue; a sponge of vinegar to those cracked lips; for that dry burning throat a final stinging draft before his soul goes out and there comes in peace.

Mystery with God, but not with this Christ. Trumpets with God, but from this Christ one thin clear note of courage.

4

One thing there was which cut me close, the death of John Eskdale. It was not until my father's death we touched again at Jamestown, and then, remembering Pascal's ears, I had to wait my time before I inquired of the tavernkeeper. That was my answer. It seemed he had died not long after our meeting. His servant had gone, neither did any one know of his whereabouts. Sick though I knew him to be, the blow struck home. I had depended much upon his help; I knew him for my friend, and I had much need of his friendship now, of his fine courage. I knew myself a lonelier man than ever, now he was gone. I stood bereft of everything excepting my own wits.

Odd how a man I had not thought of, a man I had met only once, should have known me better than I knew myself and assured me so earnestly I would one day go back. I had been so confident then, so sullen in my bitterness, so self-assured. I had pondered then on that strange woman magic which made him proffer help to one he knew so little. I knew it now for what it was, a strange and subtle thing from which there is no escape.

Later I stood against the wall directly beneath that same room where he and I had talked. A room now echoing with noise and laughter, for some were at dinner there. A room I could remember dim and quiet, and hear again that gentle gallant voice:

“Ah, ye may talk; so I’ve heard others. Ye will get back; kick out against the pricks and sight your end. Maybe I’ll not live to see the flight start in your eyes; but I shall tell as I tell now, there’ll come a challenge that will turn ye home.

And the months were not so great a while gone, and he lay cold beneath cold earth, and I alone to answer that challenge.

I turned back into the public room and called for wine and meat. I took out with great care—for it had been my business to learn walls have eyes as well as ears—the paper he had given me; the paper I had stared at with suspicion at first, then amazement; the paper I had signed as well at his bidding with doubt and faint amusement; the paper which I knew now meant my hope for security when I reached England. The order to Child’s Bank. He had told me slyly at the time:

“I’d not reckoned for this meeting; I’d bidden these folks”—the bankers—“did they hear naught of me for one good year, to make inquiries, and if their seeking took them no further than the churchyard, to start on ye. They would have smelt out your coat in time enough; believe me, they’re rare canny at the asking.”

I put the paper snug away into my belt. A year I judged it or nearly since his death. I wondered how far their inquiries might lead them. I knew, then, this was my marching-time.

And thus it was within the month we had set sail for Yorktown, with skin and ivory for trading. Accord-

ing to Pascal and the rest, we were at our old game, to watch the shipping and the harbor. One way to look at it, and for the moment I would have none other; yet, for my own part, it was my last trick and a most desperate one. One ship I would mark, indeed, but it would be for my own ends.

We went in the brig with smug looks and a quiet show. Only Pascal and I; Death I had sent on some matter inland; Jamie remained at the sound. I was glad of this; or rather glad to be rid of Death at such a moment. I missed Jamie. It must have been weeks since I had last spoken to him of Plover's Cove. I had an uneasy feeling he had missed these talks; and though I had become highly suspicious lest he should remember my questionings too clearly, and ponder on them, yet on his sober days I used to notice his wistful eyes turned to catch mine, then turn away again while with scarlet cheeks he would pull with trembling fingers at something which might be near to him, and, as I made no answer nor looked his way, start for the bottle.

Overdrinking. Even Pascal said it; did I but dare to take him along with me, he might have had a longer stretch of happiness than he could possibly look forward to now. He might have found some peace for his dissolute, tormented soul. I used to think in after years, "Had I the pluck . . ." I had none then. What man all dreams will turn one step aside as he strives, desperate, on his star-stained track?

The night before we sailed the four of us were gathered in the great room above the hall, Pascal and Jamie at cards, Death and I at chess. We paired at the

two ends of the table, and in between us scattered the remains of a disordered meal. I have often thought of that final scene in the old palazzo, that last night I spent in the place. The very drama of the occasion held me quiet. I had come here a youth; I was leaving a man. When I had first crossed the broken street, jostled and pushed by all the staring crowd, anxious to see their captain's son, I had thought, "This is adventure"; I had whispered, "This is romance." Staring now across the room out into the night, I was thinking, "Soon, I shall know the meaning of adventure, the depth of romance."

Eight years had stripped my boyhood and turned me old, in mind as well as years, had made sharp my wits, had made cunning my soul. Once I had thought these were the only things that mattered to a man; now I knew I would learn wisdom and the beauty that comes from wisdom. I think if any one had touched me then and questioned, "What will ye seek?" I should have said, "Myself; there is a chance I might find that lost self out of here."

Said Pascal, shrill from the further end:

"Pox me, I shall be drained as an empty glass if the dice do not smile."

Then, as they rattled on the table, came his shriller cry: "Two fours! 'Pon wig, this is a nasty night."

An exclamation from Death made me turn to him. He was smiling and cracking his fingers. I said vacantly, "Check?" and stared and said with more interest: "And game! Faith, my brain is all muddle."

He shook his head and bent in closer; he took the chalk and scrawled, "A way out."

I frowned. "Curse me if I see it! Have you devil's eyes?" And looked at him sharply, as if struck by the thought, and stared suddenly transfixed by that amazing face. That night it seemed to me as if a strange ageless look was stamped there in greater strength than I had yet noticed; the uneven insolent eyes, the long red line down the one cheek, the cool indifference and yet alert poise to his whole body. And, above all, the narrow hands, delicate yet of such power, always repulsive with their uncanny swiftness. I remember how, in my first days on the brig, that face had rushed in on me and held me even in my fever as a stoat will hold a rabbit; how that mouth had seemed so terrible in its gaping, had chased me from nightmare to nightmare with its fiendish laughter; how in the days to come I had listened to that same laughter with little care, knowing it was but Laughing Death out hunting.

Now it was coming in on me differently; facing him at this quiet game, I might have been facing him for the first time on the deck of *The Five Wounds*. The old terror, the old horror; and with it the thought, "From this—is it possible to get away?"

I said with difficulty, "I cannot do it."

He made a movement with his hands, so near to my face that I leaned back with a quick catch of breath. He did not seem to notice. He had moved my men for me and was now smiling straight in my face; he had scrawled with the chalk, "Is it not simple?"

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I muttered, "'Fore God, yes!" I thought with a dull drumming in my heart. "*Do you know?* Am I also so simple to you?"

He was rearranging the pieces. He rubbed the chalk out and scrawled, "Watch this!" He added, "Taught by an old priest in Porto Rico." I said, for something to say:

"What of him?"

His shoulders shot up in a kind of ecstasy; he waved his hands, drawing one finger with a deft, sleek movement around his throat, chalking briefly, "Not wanted."

Pascal was swearing now at Jamie, his voice ringing through the still room:

"'Pon wig, what a hanky-panky numbskull of a man! First you strip me clean, then you thumb the cards like a suckling babe! Play cat's-cradle with the newest born, an it please ye; but pox me, 't is a game I want."

He was very red in the face and fretful in temper. I called to him: "Time near. We must not miss the tide."

He retorted peevishly: "Plague take you and the tide! This game, and I'll be done. Now, twitting bird, throw!"

I turned back to Death, placing the pieces with extraordinary care and cunning. I was steadier now, as sober as I ever had been. I took up one of the reds, put it on the palm of my hand, and stared at it closely. I could not help admiring it. I had never seen men so beautifully fashioned as these of Death's. I took up the green king.

"My father, eh?" I said. "By God, there is a magic

to your fingers!" I put it down with a sudden distaste. I said roughly, "You should have carved him preacher," and flipped one of the bishops as yet headless.

I must have hit upon a touchy point; he made a noise in his throat as if he would have said much, had he been able. He wrote so fiercely that the chalk snapped:

"These are men, marching as men. No place for boasters!"

I thought again, "So, you go very deep."

I said, "As you please; 't is your own game."

I got to my feet and stretched, then leaned down again to remark: "Faith, though, you go slow. How is it? Red queen and king, two knights, green queen and her two knights all faceless?"

He looked at me oddly, fondling a lump of ivory all the while as if it had been a precious doll; then scrawled slowly:

"I wait on time."

I said beneath my breath, "Why, so do I."

I caught up my sword with a clatter and turned upon Pascal impatiently. "Up, now, Pascal. Shall we miss our tide because of your infernal nonsense?"

Pascal got to his feet with a snort and leaned for his pistols.

"Twenty-five guineas gone warm from my pocket; the artfulness of a jackass."

I said: "Hey! If he is a jackass, what of you?"

"Oh, tush!" he snapped, and overturned a chair. "I play like a man, but not e'en the devil himself could do aught against a bag o' tricks."

I followed him clattering down the stairs; then, at the doorway, turned back and crossed to Jamie.

I put a hand to his shoulder and said gruffly, "Hey, Jamie, what shall I bring back?"

He was half asleep, lolling in his seat, snoring, his eyes near closed. But he opened them as I spoke and grinned aimlessly up at me. "If there be Hollands, why they are good; but if it be rum, why, Lord, it is better."

And I laughed and pressed his shoulder and called him, "David's sow." And those were the last words he ever spoke to me or I to him.

5

And when the time came it was all so easy. I supposed then the gods were heedless of my existence, and let me go as I pleased; other matters and bigger were theirs; afterward, well, that can wait.

We were five days in Yorktown working well to our ends, and on the fifth due to start back. It was upon the evening of the fourth I made my start. I had seen the lay of things in a quiet unobtrusive manner; I had found out much that was of importance to me, that a brig, the *Nightingale*, was due for sailing on that Friday evening for London Docks. She was a small ship carrying but three passengers, and this her last voyage this trade; thereafter she would be used for the East Indies. Nothing better for me; I made my arrangements accordingly.

We played cards that night at some tavern with two or three we had met there; we played until eleven of

the clock, by which time I knew the *Nightingale* would be all ready to leave harbor. I said to Pascal:

"There is no taste to this method of losing guineas; and I am as tired as any dog. I'll go aboard."

He grunted and rattled the dice impatiently. "Pox me, what manner of sport is this? Oh, have it your way! Now, sir, will you take his hand?"

The man whom he addressed answered eagerly enough and drew a fistful of gold out, and with two others settled down to the play. I put my hand on Pascal's shoulder.

"We clear in the morning; keep fresh for that."

He shook me off impatiently. "'Pon wig, was there ever such a man? Get snug between the sheets; I'll be there to tickle your toes ere the dawn breaks."

I laughed with the rest. "Then you must find your own boatman or swim. Ours lie snug; and they'll not go look for your carcass!"

Shrilled Pascal: "Plague take your chatter! Pox me if my hand is not all a-twist! I care not for boats or beds. This is my night, but I will be yours in the morning."

I turned away with a shrug to find the landlord. I paid him my reckoning and bade him good night and turned out to the street.

There was no moon, and it was unusually dark—all good things for me. I ran lightly down the street, for I could not reckon to the exact time the *Nightingale* would sail; it was a matter of tide and how she would use it. I knew well her berth, and it was toward that

I instantly turned and looked when I reached the wharf. Other lights here and there, like hanging stars, stood about the harbor. Then I saw faintly, yet certainly, one slowly moving red disk and knew it for hers. The place was very quiet and empty, not a soul that I could make out, no footsteps or voices; up toward the town some singing and distant shouting; down here complete silence, save the soft lapping of the water. I was used to working in the dark, and now, like a cat, yet swiftly for my time was short, I crept to the many boats fastened there and loosened one out on the water. If I had to be quiet before, I needed to be a mere moving shadow, if I would escape notice by those other ships; I went soft on the oars and peering into the darkness trusting entirely to my eyes and my skill that I did not suddenly crash into something. Once I came right up against the very bows of a huge ship, and straining up saw her name *H. M. S. Firefly* and heard the soft thud, thud of her lieutenant on watch. To be caught in such a case would have been of little consequence in one way, for as captain of my brig I could row as I pleased. But I would not risk being hailed. My watch had ears as well as any other; I would not have them hear my voice. I would not dare to go on if such a thing happened. I must get this business done silently, if at all; once heard—then I must delay further, and that I could not bear. So I crept in and out of these great ships until I was being rocked by the swell from the slowly moving *Nightingale*.

Now came the moment! I stood upright in the boat and took off my coat. I wrapped it in a bundle and

flung it out into the water, sending my hat with it. In my shirt-sleeves I rowed the closer in until I saw her name in white gleaming letters, then dropped from the boat right into the sea, yet holding its sides so that it turned completely with me, and for a second I was down beneath it while it floated over me, bottom up. For that second the water sucked me and drummed in my ears and nostrils until my head seemed like a monstrous bag, and then I came up gasping and puffing for breath. There was a rope hanging from her. A lucky find I had not expected. I caught it in both hands, kicked with my feet against the sides, swung and clung until, all bruises, I was on deck spitting and choking. Hardly a moment to breathe had I when a man came hustling up with a lantern, a red-faced, bearded fellow, puffing with indignation and importance.

"How, sir? What, sir? Now, sir? What means this? Answer, sir."

Said I, still gasping: "Sir, I ask pardon. If it had not been for a most unfortunate accident I would have boarded your ship in a more gentlemanly manner."

Said he, redder than before: "Sir! that is no answer. Begad, sir, I would have you know I am a man of simple words and simple ways; I have keel-hauled men for less than sneaking in ships!"

I said: "Sir, I am delighted to hear it, for the simpler a man the greater is my respect for him. I am most desperately anxious to get to England, and your ship, so the agent told me, is the last to sail for another two weeks."

He said less gruffly, but still highly suspicious, "What then, sir?"

"Why, this: I have my plantation in the hills, and if my horse had not turned lame I would have got here with due courtesy. As it is—I have soiled my shirt and lost my coat. Faith, I can ride, but boats seem vilely treacherous things. Now, sir, if I may give you my papers and my passage money, maybe I can make amends for my bad manners."

He said cautiously, "Oh, ye have the guineas, have ye?"

I put my hand to my belt. "Sir, I hope to make you satisfied."

He shuffled with his feet and spat noisily into the sea. "Why, I have no ill will against a passenger . . ." He swung his lantern and spat again. "Maybe I can find ye a coat. Come this way; we'll see to settlement."

He walked forward, and I followed him. We were running quit of the harbor and out to the sea. Yorktown lay behind us with all her twinkling lights; there also, snug and quiet, lay the brig; there also, still at his cards and wine, sat Pascal. One life passing, another opening ahead. I had cut my cable; I was out upon the tide.

CHAPTER II

I

UNTIL I put foot in Bristol I think I must have walked continually in a dream. I am aware of few happenings on the ship; I was left alone, and I desired no more. In London, once we were anchored at Deptford Reach, my only interest was to get my business done and take coach for Bristol.

London meant little or nothing to me. I saw it first in the pale morning, a still, gray town with buildings hunched shoulder to shoulder, with filth about its pavements and lumpish forms sleeping the night away at odd corners. I remember still how the quiet frightened me, as if in every shadow I saw the face of Pascal, Jamie, or Death, as if in any sudden sound I heard their laughter and their mockery. I know once I turned and cut away down some narrow street to the river. There was more space here and better chance to breathe, ships to be seen; and such were friends of mine. And if it was that I wanted, it seemed I should not lack companionship. The rattle of chain, the creak of wood, and I was staring at three great swollen bundles swinging midair against the sky; listening how merry a noise was theirs, as they strained against the wind, and how they bobbed and nodded a freakish welcome. It struck me then with some grim humor,

this might have been a well planned jest; I had forgotten it was the custom to hang pirates at Wapping Stairs.

Later on, well after noon, when there was crowd enough to jostle, I remember how the very numbers cramped my heart. I had been used to a very different people. I had been used to faces I could read as from a book. Dark hidden signals there; plot or meaning; business or purpose; men were known each to each, or watched upon, in western ports. Here were bigger numbers than I had known, colder eyes, greater assurance. I was a thief crept back from the night to bark my heels against their cool indifference. And yet I envied them. Dream folk, I thought, secret from me and likely to be through all my days. To me, then, this London held no reality except those three swinging figures of my own cloth and coat.

Such was my mind I decided to hire a horse for my journey to Bristol rather than meet with other such friendless staring in the coach. Yet I know so dread and cold were my feelings I think I would have gone crazed had I heard nothing else but the thudding of his hoofs all the while, and at Reading I left him and took the coach.

And once we were drawn up at the White Hart in Bristol, the numbness passed. I had got home again. There might be a price to my head or there might not; there might come fortune or the blackest luck. To me these things did not matter; to me then came no such thoughts. This was the place of my freshest,

finest days. It did not matter if I could not recapture them. I had got back. I had not known such peace.

It was so natural to walk down Castle Street to the harbor; it was so easy to turn and stare over the water before I crossed the cobbles to where the old trading-house used to stand. Not once, I think, had I ever missed to pause at that corner and scan the shipping, to mark if any of our trade had slipped to anchor in the night so that her captain would now be waiting in the counting-house. Not a ship now could I see known to me; not a name gleaming among those many names to hold my eyes with recognition. How was it possible? Old Bride was dead and young Peter Comfort forgotten long ago.

It seemed but yesterday I had stumbled in the fog and shut my ears against that frightful laugh and heard the padding feet of Death dog at my elbow. But yesterday I had crashed the counting-house door open and in the gloom of that still place seen old Bride lolling his dead face on the desk. Now it was spring in England, blue skies, bursting sun; now as a stranger I stood staring at the old place, searching for the old name and seeing only some one had tarred it out and had another, foreign to me, painted over it. But for the name, there was no change inside. Why, there stood the desk at the further end, there went the door to the private closet, nothing altered; the bales of stuffs, the old stained charts; even a boy lounging in my seat, sharpening his pen and whistling as I had done. He might have been

my ghost, only young Peter Comfort had never died. Young Peter Comfort had changed; all this had just remained.

2

I came a little into the room, saying loudly:

“Sir!”

He gave a kind of gasp and swung round with startled eyes. “Ecod; you made me jump!”

He was a young, fresh-looking lad, and once he had got over his surprise he showed much importance and friendliness.

Said he, with a great air: “What would you, sir? Or is it Mr. Allan you wish for?”

I put my head to one side and surveyed him thoughtfully. “Allan? Allan, said you? That was not the name.”

He seemed disappointed or possibly impatient. “That is our name—” He caught my eyes and blushed furiously. “Mr. George Allan, West-India merchant.”

I said slowly, “Bride; was there not a Henry Bride?”

He puffed his cheeks and looked me up and down as if I had been born yesterday. “What name?”

I said patiently: “Bride. Could you tell me where I might find him?”

He squared himself comfortably on his seat and grinned back. “In the churchyard,” he said coolly. “If it please you to search.”

That he thought me a fool there was no questioning; that I thought him a callous young dog was equally

certain. But he was of his kind, and I had to find out much before I walked too far in Bristol, and I could see no better way than getting it out of this villain. I cried, endeavoring to be as surprised as possible:

“’Fore God; is he dead, then?”

He nodded. He seemed pleased at the astonishment he had occasioned.

I asked, “Lately!”

He shook his head. “I am seventeen and left school these five years. I was there when it happened. Such a brew there was. Ecod!”

I asked, “What manner of a way?”

He stared at me impishly, and I know he hoped to startle me again.

“Pirates,” said he. “Pirates at this very wharf. Ecod, but there was a drumming round the town when it was discovered! We’d the admiral of the blue and half the king’s ships, soldiers all to quarters and the call for militia. They kept us all at school that day, but some broke out, and two shipped as sailors. I’d ha’ gone, and was out for it, but they laughed at my size and sent me back to be caned.”

He seemed lost in miserable reflection; I interrupted to demand:

“Did they—did they do much damage?”

“Ecod, I should say they did. Seemed they must ha’ followed a ship of Bride’s, for ’t was her unlaying they went after. Damage! Why, sir, they knifed the old man and took his partner and left a letter lettin’ out what they had done, as cool as cool! So many

bundles of this, that, and tother, so much gold, and the young man because they liked young men—" He was for gabbling further, but I cut in sharply:

"What of that young man? Did there come news?"

He shrugged his contempt. "Who'd send it? Sold as a slave; that's how the talk went. Why, sir, there's big money in such like."

I said steadily, "Had he no relations, this fellow?"

He yawned. "An aunt! It was her death."

I had never expected otherwise, yet his very bluntness hurt me so that I know I caught the doorpost to steady myself. He did not seem to see my state; he exclaimed more excitably than ever:

"Why, sir, that pirate villain sent word even to her, for my father saw it! Ecod, sir, my father was clerk to the assizes. Told her he'd taken what was his due. What the Lord had given, naught but the Lord should take away! Ecod, sir, there's a brazen crazed villain!"

I whispered, "It killed her."

He went on: "Such a stir I swear there'd never been. People all bedded when the light scarce'd gone, double watch posted, and king's ships all along the shore. 'T was a shame how they kept us at school those days. Faith, chance of such a kind is a rare thing."

I asked, "And they could do nothing?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Every ship from the port carried a warrant to arrest the murderer—"

I said quickly, "That was—"

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He stared at me blankly. "Ecod, sir, the pirate; who else?" He stared in amusement. "'T was n't the partner, you know. As I said, pirates came."

I did n't answer him. I was thinking how my father had lied to me hand over fist; trapped me not once but again and again; I could have gone back. He had left proof and enough; I was no murderer, and I knew now, had he left none, my word would have been accepted had I returned. Easy to have got away, easy to have remained young Peter Comfort. Yet not so easy, once I had set eyes on *The Five Wounds*, once I had raised my sword in salute to Adventure. It needed something greater I did not understand to make me sheath it and turn to seek a greater love.

I looked over at my informer. He had his back to me and was busy with his papers. I said heavily, "Well, young sir, I thank you—" And turned to go.

He swung round on his stool. "Will you not wait for Mr. Allan?"

I shook my head. "Not now."

He caught a pen and poised it high and ready; I had not seen so eager a face.

"You will have a venture, sir? Our ship, our best ship, sails this night for the Barbados?"

I smiled back at him. "Why, yes, I have a venture, but somehow different. I will call back again. Good day."

He cried after me with much impatience and bustle. "As you please, sir! Wish you good day."

3

I had been given at Child's Bank a letter to their agent here; it was to this man I immediately turned as I left the harbor. I had made up my mind I would ride to Plover's Cove that very night; somehow I could not sleep in Bristol. I could not face the ghosts.

They had been exceeding kind at Child's. I had been full of explanation and even doubts; there had been no need for either. I was to learn afresh how great a faith John Eskdale had in Margaret's son. It appeared he had written the very night we had met, advising them I would quite shortly be in England and what manner of man they were to look for. I used to think if I had any lesson to learn in life I would seek it from him.

He was a long loose fellow, this agent, with a pale, plump mouth and a smooth skin. He wore immense horn spectacles, balanced at the very end of his nose, from beneath which his nostrils gaped like two black caverns. He wore his own hair and, like his dress, kept it remarkably untidy; he seemed to live in an atmosphere of snuff and dust. He was named Crumpleton.

Said this strange man, "Peter Comfort?" And we both stared, and I wondered how long a time he had lived here and if my name was familiar or not. But he made no comment, and I had determined, once I knew for certain how free a man I was, I would keep a tight hold to my tongue, rather than talk to the

center of all gossips. So I left it to him, and it seemed he had nothing to say.

He grunted, "From foreign parts?"

I told him, "The plantations."

He took snuff with great volume through one nostril, completely closing the other. He said thickly:

"'T is all the same to me. How runs the coast-line? Sea at the north, sea at the south, sea to east and west; and land snug and fresh and green set in between. Yet, damme, men must cross that sea as if the devil pricked at their heels; and for what? Naught but to come back, as I can see. I'd have 'em chained there if I was a king and wore a crown."

He released the nostril with a great snort. He said, severely, "Pray, why did you go?"

I said slowly, for his oddness made me speak with caution, "Circumstances."

He settled himself deep into his chair. "Pish! And I suppose circumstances brought you back?"

I said, "Sir, I think you have my credentials?"

He blinked heavily. "That neither excuses your going or your coming. If men stayed in England they would be better Englishmen, and England a prettier nation if, once gone, those same rascals kept away."

I said with some warmth:

"I would keep your sneers for others than they! It is not so easy to live even in England; circumstance drives men hard."

He sat very straight and swallowed very hard. "It may drive them to the gallows, for all I care. God

save you, young man; what has your going away taught you?"

I laughed at him. This queer old man, for all his freakish notions and talk of England, could never have so eager or so passionate an answer as I could give—or Jamie.

"Why, love for England!"

He gave an exasperated grunt and shook his ragged hair about his shoulders. "Pretty words," he scoffed. "Pretty words. Light goings, light comings!" He jerked angrily with his spectacles and peered at me the closer. "Why these parts?"

I thought, "Now for the questioning." But I answered, staring him straight in the face, "I was at Blundells in my school days."

He seemed to think this was the cause of my undoing. "A wild place," he retorted. "And like all these parts it breeds much recklessness. I have no wonder you took ship away; I am from Worcester, and there we have good sober ways. Here—" he took snuff again with a whistle of breath. "Here, there is continual noise, disputes." He tossed the papers on his table until they flew from table to floor in a whirl of disorder. "God save you, sir, my drawers reek of disputes!" he said suddenly and sharply. "Well, you call on me for money; what else would you have?"

I stammered: "Why, they informed me at Child's you might put me in the way of land or something of that. I would settle further out."

He jerked with his head, "Farming?"

"So I thought."

"And pray where?"

I felt very sick and very cold. I replied with as much steadiness as I could, "Plover's Cove."

He flung his hands in the air. "Plover's Cove? Pish! What foolishness!"

I could but stare at him.

4

I had never thought there could be any cause for any man to raise an obstacle to Plover's Cove. I had set out on this desperate adventure only that I might go there and live my dream. Was it possible that now, now when it was all so near to me, this mad fellow knew some reason that must break my plan? It shocked me. At that instant I thought my heart must burst. But the man Crumpleton gave me no time to think. He had clapped his two fingers to both gaping nostrils so that his voice rang like a broken fiddle cord.

"God save us, you will be farming?"

I nodded, unable to speak but staring at him with straining eyes.

"Then why go where all is fishes and cattle? Why live where every acre is pasture-land and every mouthful you stomach is some sort of fish?"

I said foolishly, not understanding, "You know it well?"

He released his nose with much violence and boomed right in my face: "Know it? God save you, young gentleman, there has not been a Crumpleton that did not serve the Hall since it were built! Pish, sir! Look

here, here, and here." He beat with frantic fingers at bundles of papers on the shelf at his head until the dust flew in clouds and the leaves crackled and fluttered. "Lynden papers—Lynden papers. Disputes, accounts, purchases, payments; naught but Lynden all the way through. From Worcester I come, sir; in Worcester was I born, and at the bank there did I learn my trade; but when my uncle grew old, then I took this stool, and with it the Lynden moneys and the Lynden books."

I whispered, "Lynden, Lynden—"

He whistled the snuff through his nostrils. "Well, sir, and why not?"

"Lynden!" said I.

"And a monstrous wild name in these parts; a crazy people; God save you, I know none crazier! Not a mad scheme but a Lynden has not been fair caught in it; and now 't is cattle!" He beat on the table until the drawers rattled. "Cattle, cattle, cattle. Not cows, merely, nor sheep, nor even pigs, but great horned beasts, monstrous foreign creatures; farming! Pish! You 'll find none in Plover's Cove; it stinks with dung."

I asked, and I wondered I could master my voice at all, "But if I could buy—surely there would be no objection to my trying?"

He flung his hands in the air and groaned aloud. "As mad as a Lynden! What did I say? Folly goes to foreign parts, and folly comes back. Hark you, sir: George Lynden is dead, the last male Lynden for the while. Folly drove him to the plantations and

further than that, and why, sir? For cattle, sir! For this scheme of breeding and that scheme of breeding; and as ill comes to all men who cross the seas, so to George Lynden; he dies there. God save you, was there ever such a miserable end to such foolishness?"

I said dryly, "Why, all men die some day."

He waggled a contemptuous finger. "And welcome—to lie in honest soil! A pretty pass to lie alone in heathen parts."

I had a sudden thought of Eskdale, Jamie. "That 's so. Pretty pass." I cried desperately, still thinking of them, "Sir, I have my heart set in Plover's Cove!"

He grunted. "Fool's talk, not fresh to me." He stretched suddenly and pulled great calf-bound books beside him, and flopped them open and raced the pages over, with much exclamation and snorting.

"See here, see here! Moorland, grass-land, rough pasture, rough pasture; look for yourself if you will; you might sow your guineas as seed in such stubborn land."

I said, "I have risked as much before."

"And will again!" He banged the books together. "As you please, as you please. I am here to sell in a small way, but mad as Mistress Sorrel is, she will think you madder."

I leaned closer to him, "Mistress Sorrel?"

He was sharpening a pen. "As I said, Mistress Sorrel Lynden's crazier than her father, I think. God save you, sir, there are three hundred and fifty head of cattle to her charge. 'Sell,' said I, 'and go quiet, with milking, eggs, and butter; such is maidenly.'

Pish! There is no maid so scornful or so mad as she. Her father's daughter!" He flung the pen down and caught another. "A stubborn, wilful way; a woman with cattle! Hark you, was there ever such madness? A woman to breed and sell and buy, a most unmaidenly folly; but a Lynden! A mad Lynden! And then, young sir, when she goes visiting, I have to see there is no evil work among the herdsmen. I have to watch the business. I have to run hither and thither and see this and that is done at market. And now this very day here comes a letter— She is now in Italy, saying, 'Get me an overseer, or I may bring one back from London on my passing there.' Get me an overseer! Pray from where? Three hundred and fifty head of cattle, and I to find one honest man to guard them; I to seek—" He stopped suddenly and stared at me with huge round eyes. "God save us, you know of cattle?"

I said in dismay, "Why, yes—"

He whispered, "God save us, 't is a rare hazard."

I cried angrily, "What, sir? What?"

He said softly. "Why, that you should be overseer."

5

That night in the full moon I was crossing Exmoor, and I rode like a man in a maze, for I had done so great a thing on the impulse of a moment, it shocked me. I was overseer to Sorrel Lynden and all her estate; I had given my pledge, and for six months, anyway, the bond held. And half the time I

rode I cursed Crumpleton and his fussing tongue, and half the time I marveled at my fortune and wondered how wild the end might be.

Once I pulled in my horse and stared across the tawny moor, sick in spirit, frightened like a child. Before me lay so much; behind nothing, excepting Bristol harbor, crowded with masts. I might be better aboard some ship. I had left the town soon after noon; at Axbridge I had taken my dinner, and after midnight I was on the moor. From here, my way lay on the coast side, with Dunkerry Beacon to my right, but I turned deliberately inland a short way, I wanted again to pass Crowcombe. It is the manner, I fancy, of youth to plan home-comings, and if there is a splendor in the going it is a little thing to the swagger of the return. When I had been at Blundells dreaming of this and that, which would carry me off on some tremendous exploit, I used to flush and clap my hands together in boyish glee at the thought of how the village folk of Crowcombe would turn out and point and chuckle each to each with pride of the return of that tremendous fellow Peter Comfort. When we had left the place and gone to Bristol, I used to watch the ships in harbor and think—not of my going, but of my return, with all the place decked out with flags and rowing-boats, with cheering men, and soldiers in their finest, at the salute. There would not be one who would not shout me welcome, if I could find the chance to sail a ship for some great scheme.

Here was I back again. Slipped into Bristol, guarding my tongue, peering at faces wistfully, yet

hoping all might pass me by as strangers pass. Staring at ships and seeing them as grim, mocking things, their masts like long, lean fingers held up to threaten. Now, as I turned down the hill to Crowcombe, there came not even the sigh of a human voice to call me friend. A dark thin street, cold beneath the moon, with cottages concealed here and there, all heavy and uneven beneath their thatch, all closed and dark behind their shuttered fronts. And had a face looked out, I knew the kind; I was no friend; I was a solitary riding man, fit for the gun or some suspicious dog.

Eskdale had walked this street, to win my mother and take her with him. Jacob with the Mouth of Fire had tracked his way across the moors. There, at the corner, where the sign-board of the Truss of Hay creaked, I had taken the carrier's waggon each term to Tiverton; there, too, I supposed my aunt had hired a trap to Bristol, when she had fled to shun my father's shadow. And they had each passed their way further on. I was the only one to return.

Down the dark street, with its muffled doors, over the old bridge, the still water beneath pale as silver in the moon, the cry of some bird at its nest, the sighing wind in the rushes. There, I remembered, home from their secret pleasures, the wild ducks would rush the sky to rest among the reeds; and in the evening the men would bring their horses from the plow or farm, to cool their sweating limbs and thrust loose soft lips into the bubbling stream and nose the purple violets. Once I had thought to follow its run, to track it as it slipped dark by the thin wood, babbling and

clear between the grass and corn, twisted and cold like a spreading snake through the moor, and then chattering with eagerness down to the sea. I had been lost the whole day through that impish prank, and scared my aunt to tears and even praying. Now I was turning along its side, skirting the wood and by an old worn bridle-path out on the moor.

And when I first stared right across it, that great somber space, I forgot for the first time Sorrel and my extravagant quest. I remembered again Jamie, and it cut me deeper than I had ever thought, not to have had him at my side. I did not deserve so much as this. That I might feel the heather on my boots, that I might hear the wind drift on its quiet face, and smell sweet night scents in the air, rather these things for Jamie than me; Jamie who had remembered, me who had forgotten.

I was the younger, mine were the fresher thoughts; yet so deep was I swallowed in that wild blackguard life, I had to go to Jamie and his bottle if I would think of them again. I had to hear from those loose, drunken lips of all those gentle sighs and sounds which I had thought so mild compared with all the daring ventures of those hot, inglorious days. O fool, fool! I had sneered at Jamie, I had teased him in his maudlin, hopeless fits, and all the while I tricked myself; right at the back of me there had been crying, crying, this English beauty. And I hoped most passionately they saw to it that his bottle stood full forever at his side; for I knew then how terrible his pain must have been at those rare moments of sober-

ness, when all these things came back to him and dodged his reach, as I have seen a puppy play with some eager child.

6

I was nearing the sea. I could smell faintly the old salt smell; odd, it meant nothing to me then. I, who a hundred times, when returning from one of those mad expeditions with my father, had sniffed it on the wind and urged him on with love for it, now only felt it hindered all these fresh new scents of earth and growing stuffs; I had not come so far for what was already known to me. Yet this great moor, this wonderful stretch of land, now dark in shadow, now very pale beneath the moon, now showing great pits and mounds; stretching on, untamed and desolate, it had a wildness like the sea, a stillness of the same mystery; for with that brooding I could fancy the stir of life right in the very womb of the moor itself. Like some great waiting body listening—for what? I supposed Life and Death had passed and repassed here again and again: it must have known disaster and flight, passions and greater sorrow. Fashioned with much beauty and mystery. Time had given it patience still to watch for all these things to come, and with them one day its own tremendous release.

How dim and far already the old life seemed. I could not believe that beneath that same great vault of night I had once paced *The Five Wounds* straining for the day and what rich spread of sail might bring; nor how beneath so thin a moon I had played

dice upon the broken pavements of Isola Sound, and some one scraped a fiddle, while others danced to it; and we made chorus all the while, with the cracking of bottle-necks and the clink of glasses.

So far away. Out of the shadows there reared a great stag, the hind pressed close to its side. For one instant my horse paused and stared with quick surprise at the noiseless stranger; for one instant, too, those full fearless eyes rested on us, then turned to smile upon his mate and move with her away beyond the light.

So far away; but yesterday it seemed when I had waited in that huge, muffled forest until the light would break on Santa Verde. Here rode the marching stars; here stirred again the night in all its vast dark beauty; and I went lonely through the heather, looking for pity from a merciful day.

She must have passed this way. I saw her swinging through the heather. She would look brave and wonderful on this wild space. I saw her bending to the wind, and that same wind heaping her hair about her face. I knew she would be laughing in the rain, and when the mist came down it would but show the better that ruddy glow of her, when it must lift and drift its mournful way. And I wondered then, had she ever ridden in the night and longed for dawn as I now rode? Had she ever watched the thin finger of the morning cut through the blackness and all her heart go out with yearning to the breaking day? She must have looked a thousand times as I now looked, to see the rising tors and woods laid bare before that creep-

ing flame. She must have seen the sea change color and all the lights on dotted fishing-boats go out one by one. Nothing to her these simple things; she must have viewed them with indifference. But to me—I had come endless miles for this. I had heaped risk upon risk for this one glimpse; this was to me the closing in of a new life, the opening of another world.

Down through the narrow path, the thick bush crackling beneath my horse's hoofs, the sea drawing closer, and all the while the spreading day.

I was seeing more clearly now; right in the distance the other side of the moor, where it sloped the slightest, I could see cattle moving like dots, and mark there how green the grass grew and how near to the heath. A sudden turn by a hillock, and I faced the thin coast road and the little cove.

Small cottages clumped together here and there, white walls and thatched roofs, sheep in a field near-by, the first lark winging to the sky. No sign of life, though the smoke drifted from one far stack; a drowsing village and a drowsing country-side stirring perhaps, yet content still to slumber.

I had come so far; how long might I stay? Sorrel lived here, and I was near to Sorrel. This was a wonder greater than the sea; I think the mystery of it all blinded me. I let the reins drop to my horse's neck, and I put my hands to my eyes.

CHAPTER III

I

AND the first weeks were hardly gone before I settled down to all this quiet as if it had been mine all my days. Had I been told a while back that I would take up a life of so much simplicity with so much ease, I would have thought the speaker mad and fit enough for some wild jest among us all. Had I been told I could turn from the full proud sails of *The Five Wounds* to stare upon the greenness of the fields and all the beasts that crowded there with as much love, I would have thought I was being made a pretty sport of by a fool. But I was overseer to Sorrel Lynden; I was talking cattle to the herdsmen, racking my brains of knowledge learned from the Indians or our own cattle-men at Isola Sound. I spent my days out on the moor or hills, learning from the different drovers the quality of this or that beast, the treatment and the customs; or sitting through the night with endless books, to follow up the breeding, to learn the selling and the buying. How odd the change! I bought a dog and learned comradeship from him such as I had never thought before; I found pride in watching a bull-calf loose and alone for the first time in the field, heavily gamboling and shyly making advances to the grazing herd. I found pleasure in drawing out

the evenings at the Sword and Plow in lazy talk of crops and land and cattle with slow-witted, earnest farmers; I learned to like their ale; I learned to know how much Jamie missed the cider—there was a warm sweet taste which stung your throat and set your body glowing, as wine and rum could never do.

But I felt less at ease with the fishermen. They were too near to my dead life. With them I clipped my tongue, in case I let it slip too far. Theirs was the livelier life; they had the risk, the fret; they brought to the smooth little street a touch of recklessness and color. When the fishing-boats came in we sat back. They held the floor those nights.

Always some telling from them. They had been warned by a revenue cutter. They had been told to keep away from Freetown Bay. One had seen a strange sail; another had been fired on and bidden heave to, but the steersman knew a trick and they'd the laugh. Lusty men, bold in their talk and boastful some, for I think not one had seen a further port than Bristol, nor shipped aboard a bigger vessel than their own craft. It did not matter. They knew the sea, its tricks, its moods, and how rough or sweet a face it might turn. Times I have sprung forward to join in some dispute, the words only to die on my lips; I doubt if they were heard, and if so, who would listen? Their affairs were not mine—a landsman.

And all this while she was not there. I had seen her house, her gardens; I knew her land, I walked her fields; but there came no news even of her re-

turning. Crumpleton came over from Bristol and made my business known to the men on the estate. He told me then he had written her in Italy; weeks later he came again with her answer.

2

He caught me in the wood cutting branches for stakes; there was a smell of dying leaves and close warm moss; summer had all but passed, and we awaited autumn. There was something grotesque about Crumpleton in that wood; he was in dusty black with ink-stains on his cravat, and buttons missing from his coat. I think he must have been searching for me, for the sweat shone on his face and made his spectacles slip on his nose and his hair flop around in greasy strands; he had been, for he cried immediately with much peevishness:

"God save you, how you move and dodge about the place! One says you are here, and you are gone; and another you are there, and you are gone again; until I toil in the sun and scramble in the bushes, and you are turned woodman, as if there are not enough louts to chop branches but you!"

I retorted, "As to that, I like it; it's a change from the cattle and better than sitting and twisting my thumbs."

"You 'll chop 'em off soon, and then where shall I be? A pretty pot of trouble, just when you 've learned your ways and the men know you."

He was at his everlasting snuff, while, to add to his discomfort, his eyes now streamed water so he

could hardly see, and he seemed nearer to choking than talking. He grumbled on:

"A vile road and a vile rattling coach; my bones are black and my skin water!" He mopped his face vigorously and groped for his glasses now on the ground at his feet. "I am a most unhappy man, pushed here and there; bidden this and that with no thought of my comfort or dignity." He perked the spectacles back to his nose and frowned importantly. "Well! well! How is it?"

I sat on a log and stretched my legs. "Well enough; we have five young calves this week, all good and true; the knitling bull is ripe for breeding; I have turned a hundred young into the new root crop for grazing."

He grunted heavily, "She wants some thinning out; fifty at least to go to Bampton."

I stared at him very straight, suddenly bewildered. "Who—who?"

He said impatiently, "Why, Mistress Lynden, to be sure; who else?" He sputtered behind his handkerchief. "There came word from her yesterday; God save us, man, why else should I bruise myself all this way?"

I think my heart must have missed a beat; I know I fought for words and voice to speak them clearly.

"You've heard from her? Good God, man, why did n't you say it at once? She's written you? What did she say? What did she answer of me?"

I was shouting, though I hardly knew it, yet I think another might have thought me mad; with Crumpleton it did not matter. He fancied nearly all mankind

was crazed; certainly such fools who went on foreign travel. He only rolled his eyes and fluttered with his handkerchief.

"How unreasonable a tongue. Have I not said so? Am I not here for that reason?"

I leaned closer to him. "The letter, man, the letter. What did she say of me?"

He had his hat off but now put it on, I think to give himself extra importance. He cleared his throat and said stiffly:

"I am coming to that; my ways are my ways, and I keep to them. This matter of Bampton Fair—"

I cut him short. "It can wait; of myself, how did she speak?"

He really was indignant now; he wriggled on the log, and gaped all the more.

"God save us, Mr. Comfort, your manner is impertinent."

"And God save you, Mr. Crumpleton," I retorted coolly. "How I may offend or please my mistress is of greater concern to me than the cattle!"

He became very red and uncomfortable. He cried exasperated, "Why, I am coming to that!"

I said, "First. Let me hear it first."

He stuttered, "Sir, this haste is unseemly—is mad! I am telling you, am I not—"

"Nothing." I shook my head. "Nothing, nothing. What has she written of me? Call me mad, if you will. 'Fore God, it's a simple madness; let me read the letter."

He cried: "Now, that is impertinent! You fluster

me, sir; you twist my tongue! But if you so persist to hinder my way of business, be satisfied to know my choice of you pleases her; and she is content you should remain here, anyway until her return, subject that is"—he waggled one bony finger of authority—"to my approval. And let me tell you, sir, this uncouth manner is by no means favorable!"

Said I, suddenly remarkably cool: "Why, as to that, it has never yet let me down. Come, Mr. Crumpton, I would see that letter."

He looked aghast. "Sir! Sir! This is trifling. A private letter, a Lynden letter! Such correspondence is my own."

I said gently: "Not when you have an overseer, and it is of his business the letter is written. Come, come, man, let me see it. Am I not a Lynden man as much as you? I will take nothing by another's tongue; let me read for myself."

He took a great pinch of snuff; his pallid loose flesh looked flabbier than ever; he cleared his throat and made much play with his cravat. He stuttered, "You fence, sir; you twist authority—"

I smiled and shook my head. "The letter, sir, the letter"; and stretched my hand. He gave it me. He cried threatening: "Sir! She returns, sir. She returns instantly."

3

She came in October. There were fifty head of cattle picked for the fair. We drove them into Bampton by easy stages. It was late evening and there was a

thick mist when we closed in to the village. It had been my idea to get our numbers settled and herded before the morning and the final crowd crushed in. We might have been there well by noon but for the cage of mist which closed down like a web, until we lost the way along the moor and then the road. So in the end we were caught with a mob of ponies and cattle, wagons and sheep, stray dogs and bawling men and women. There was no order and little progress. Those who had not tethered their beasts together suffered the most. They would be stumbling up and down the line waving lights and shouting, accusing any stranger, scattering a docile herd to finish in a sudden scramble first in the dirt, then in the ditch.

Intervals, and a string of frightened ponies would break through with a rush and a smashing of hoofs; intervals again, and some foolish, frightened sheep, their wool lying thick and dank, would force their way panting and struggling up against some other herd, to be lost or stolen in the fog, or break the hedge and stray away among their wilder folk on the moor. For the most part, though, we kept herd behind herd, each led by its man and guarded by a dog; and we managed our own steadily enough excepting when some wild driver would make a pass with his, and once a fine young bull broke loose and used his strength with such a fury that he maimed a pony and broke the leg of our boy. It was when we reached the crossroads a half-mile from the village the confusion reached its height. For here they burst in great numbers from three roads, and not a man among

them seemed to keep his head, but nearly every one engaged in a free fight with his neighbor and a wild struggle with his frantic herd. It was just as I counted again our beasts and fought back those who nearly broke our ropes that there came the sound of wheels and the jingle of harness and some one shouted:

"Clear, clear, clear wi' ye, fules! Here comes a coach!"

And another: "Hell wi' all coaches; un 'll be ridden over. . . ."

"'T is stopped now. Break through, thou zany. Hup! Hup! Hup! Will ye no move?"

I shouted to Jaffery: "Easy now on your life. Pass that lantern, boy, gently, gently."

And Jaffery's rumbling voice thick as the mist: "Easy it be, zur! Whutt be 'bout, thou fule?" And there followed the whack of a stick to the belly of some beast, and I could hear a snort and a slither of hoofs and Jaffery again, "Zo, pretty, pretty; go zober now, durn ye!"

And we seemed suddenly to have come abreast the coach, and I could just make out its steaming horses and a fat breathing coachman, and it was on my lips to curse him for driving in a cattle road when I saw the door was open and a woman in a cloak stood peering from the step.

I suppose Jaffery and the herd passed on, and I suppose, also, even at that narrow point those who followed crowded by. I noticed none of these things. I had my horse reined in and my lantern held on high. I was very close to the face that stared back

at mine, and I knew for the second time I had met Sorrel Lynden.

It was absurd to say this was a Somerset lane, swept by mist, that mild-faced cattle and rattling wagons passed through its thickness, that men with lanterns bobbed from place to place and used great oaths with a soft drawling tongue. Absurd to think—as I had thought—the air was sweet from moor and earth, the trees were dripping and my face wet from their spattering. What lie was this? Not from the fog, but with redder, thicker stain than that. Not earth beneath my feet but stone, and she stood there against that wall of stone and not for one instant did her cool brave eyes leave my face nor shut away their contempt. Why think of cattle? Why listen for those friendly furious voices? Rattle and noise without; somewhere a shot; heat rising in thick silver haze, bank upon bank; a tainted air; a sickly stench of filth and worse than filth; and she was saying—what did she say?

“English. You?” . . .

There came a spurt of flame at my feet, and the sharp twist of my horse broke my vision. I heard a laugh—her laugh; and her voice through the darkness:

“Good faith, have I frightened you? You stare as if I were a ghost and smash your light as if you could not bear its sight. Why, this is a pretty meeting, Mr. Comfort.”

I was glad she could not see my face. Once before a green handkerchief, and now the fog; true

coward's luck. I found myself answering, and I marveled at my control:

"You were not expected so suddenly. Crumpleton did not tell me—"

"He did not know," she said quickly. "I had a wish to get here for Bampton. Last year I was prevented; this year I was all determination. I have longed to see how well my own cattle may do."

I was cooler now, quieter in mind, and said: "They are as fine in numbers as any here. There should be luck with them to-morrow."

Some one—her man, I think—had fetched another lantern, so it now happened we were very close within that circle of light. Closer than we had been those countless nights ago. Now she saw my face and I saw hers purged of the scorn and anger yet with the same brave open look; and now she smiled and her eyes danced.

She said: "Why, I cannot make them out in all this dimness; so much for women's foolishness to search them in the lanes instead of waiting for daylight. Well, never mind. I have seen nothing excepting my overseer." She seemed to twinkle more than ever. She continued, "And duty tells me I must see more of him so—we will expect you for supper at the Boar and Hound, when you have housed them safely."

And I was alone in the lane and the mist.

4

It was very much later when I went to the Boar and Hound. The mist had cleared, but a fine rain

was falling. There was noise enough from the street and the yard of the inn; but in the small room, to which I was shown, it was very quiet. The window was open, but a great fire blazed and the room gleamed from it and the light of candles. There came to me instantly the same sense of quiet I had known that night at Port Royal when I talked with Eskdale. I had told him then it was mockery to think either board or room would share food or warmth with me. Odd how the memory came back now while I faced the first who bade me welcome and she was a woman.

She told me she lived and traveled with a governess of hers; they would have been with us that night, but they had traveled far and she was over-tired.

"She does not," she told me, "vex herself because you and I dine alone. She is too shrewd, to," and she smiled mischievously. "Too well brought up. Faith, it was impossible to do all I would with the estate and constantly have her running at my heels. But, you see, Mr. Comfort, we must have extra care with our manners."

I said: "I cannot answer for mine. I do not remember sitting down with a lady since I was very little."

I thought she looked faintly amused.

"Why, there are ladies enough in the plantations, so I've been told."

Was she mocking me? I said deliberately, "My days were rough; there was little in them that was smooth—or pretty."

She had her hands folded beneath her chin; she was watching me with curious interest. She asked, "You were not alone?"

I shook my head. "Not quite."

"These others, were they all as rough as the life?"

I let the servant fill my glass again. "There was little choice."

She said dreamily, "Cattle and trade—was that it?"

I looked across at her and wished she had not asked the question. "That was so; sometimes—other things."

She pushed aside her plate and began to peel an orange. "Why did you come back?"

How comic a question. I wanted to laugh. I had not thought it could become so grotesque. If I had answered, "Because of you," would she also have seen the hideous joke?

I said: "Two men I had met. They had no hope, either of them, to return. It was the look in their eyes which made me know how much I had lost in all those years."

She said, "It must be dull." She looked up sharply: "Faith, man, is all changes. You may talk so; there is some right to it; and then there comes a break to the mood and it is all gloom and restlessness to get back. You will come to me so one day, Mr. Comfort."

I cried out: "Madam, you do me wrong! I am your servant. I am more than that, a seeker after quiet."

She made a gesture with her hands: "Oh! I know, I know. So will a hunting-dog kennel month by

month; then turns the wind, and he is no more than one with nature running with the leaf."

I whispered, "Some leaves fall to lie still."

She shrugged her shoulders. "Well, well. So might I have said—or my father once; somehow there came a wind."

I asked curiously, "Did you regret it?"

She cried coldly, "You have no right to ask that question; no right." She pushed aside the candlestick, so I saw her face full in the light, and once again it was the woman at Santa Verde who stared at me. "It broke my faith," she whispered. "It is a monstrous thing to lose one's faith. It made me see things, know things I cannot forget. It hurt my pride; it made me think in such a way I did not think was possible."

There came the crash of a distant door and the whistle of song; a staggering gust of wind blew the casement to with a clatter and sent the smoke like fog about the room. And still her face did not change; and I knew then how strong the gulf spread between us. How wide.

I answered dully: "Easier to lose than to find. How many go seeking and finish beggars. I have seen men, and seen their faces, too; marked the change—how the shadow deepens in their eyes."

She pushed away her chair and moved to the fire-side; she leaned there with her arm upon the chimney, turning away from the room. She kept quiet a while, then answered slowly:

"It is not my business." She turned, and the move-

ment had all the swift freshness of a young animal. "You hear? Not my affair. Are they not full of courage, these fine fellows? Am I to weep because they lose it?"

I said desperately, "Women have cried for less—"

"Women?" she laughed scornfully. "Well, I am not—women! They like to waste their tears; they are the kind who scream at a mouse and smile at a rogue. I lived with my father, Mr. Comfort. I was brought up man's fashion, not woman's. Where he went, I went; in all manner of places, with all manner of men, seldom women. Sometimes I am sorry I ran so loose; had I been held with tighter rein I might have seen less. As it is, tears were out of fashion in my life, and when I learned them first, they were not womanly; they brought with them—"

There was something in her eyes which made me get to my feet and lean toward her against the table. She was looking at me and yet beyond; it was as if she had forgotten me, as if between the two of us there stretched immense space and silence. I saw her then, distant and remote, surrounded entirely by her own thoughts and emotions. It seemed as if the world closed round me; my world; a gray dead place, having no warmth or security but solitary and full of terror. I turned from her and crossed to the door. I think she was still looking after me as I left the room.

Yet in the days that came I cannot remember being ever again conscious of that void, but rather of her

comradeship. That was a side of woman I did not realize. I learned it after. I, who, expecting nothing, suddenly stood to receive; she gave it frankly from the first. She claimed me as her friend rather than her servant. Hers was the rarest spirit I had ever known—the glad fine heart, the gallant air. There was a beauty born of boyish pride I used to love. I have seen her moving free and careless like some shepherd youth of old among her beasts; and watched them toss their stately heads in salutation, while some, more daring, would press her skirt with trembling nostrils. There was a splendor in such greeting. And I have seen her, flushed with a gentler grace, bending her head to smile on two young starlings, cupped in her palms, weak and forlorn from a battered nest and dead mother, until beneath her care they turned stout and gay, and warm with wild strange thoughts, to burst from those same hands and spin away among the trees, hot to explore.

Comradeship! Until I used to think, "She is too close with me." Until I used to cry: "Ah! why not? When comes the end, give me the memory."

How the thing grew! There was no help to it. She had a marvelous pride in Plover's Cove, a pride of name, of house and state. Cattle to her were not cattle only; they were Lynden beasts. Land was not earth alone; it was Lynden earth. Those of the village were not merely men and women; they were Lynden folk, they were "my people." So as the time passed on she captured me; I learned her mind, her spirit; and all that little land clove to my heart as

if I stood a Lynden man right from my weaning.

She tutored me. Days I have ridden at her side from field to field, and seen the beauty of the earth as seen by her, and learned the wisdom of the growing earth through her wise loving eyes, and seen the persistence of a God of beauty. Where rots the tree will spring some sweeter flower. I could look back and laugh at the vain striving of my father's work, when he had thought the world one heaped-up sacrifice, when he saw God marching the heavens sword in hand. Here was a greater mystery than his wild mad words, the mystery of one gigantic movement, a compact between the earth and all the beasts and creeping things. I continued building up. However much man may destroy, God plants again.

All learned from her. She used to say, "Well, are you learning your own land?" She used to laugh and cry: "Are you weary of it yet? Will you be gone to-morrow?"

And once I cried, "Ah! but I can never go!"

But she only laughed the more. "Oh, I have patience—such patience!" Then stopped and stretched her hand to hold me back. "Here comes the wind again; better than words, this wind."

We had been walking at the edge of a wood, from which the moor tilted directly down to the sea. All that afternoon we had been among the cattle, scurried by the rising wind, wet in the thin rain. A gray day, with low hanging clouds and a heaving white sea; an hour when sea and land were one in their great

lonely waste, while over all threshed the wind, humming low as yet as if brooding on its strength. It changed as she spoke. I felt her hand close upon mine and saw her thrust up her head as if in ecstasy of greeting to that mighty roar. It swept the rain across the moor in little misty clouds. It bent the trees and rushed the dying leaves in one great mad flight up and away and on across the heather. A troop of ruddy happy things spun from their nest in that wild hurry. I looked at Sorrel, her tawny hair loose and damp across her cheeks, her eyes eager and full of dancing lights, her body taut against the wind. She answered to its trumpet as I have known a ship press forward, radiant and proud. I could feel her hand tighten on mine as the great cool blast thundered about our ears; she turned her head to cry:

“No wind like an English wind; this was the thing my father used to miss when we were traveling.”

It was the first time she had talked of her father, and I asked stupidly, “Did he die out of England?”

She nodded, looking now across the tumbling rocking sea. She repeated, “Out of England.” There came a sharp spurt of rain, driven in on the racing wind. She cried:

“That is the way when men go out; that was the way with my father. Lyndens have gone from here, yet some have come back to die. It seemed unkind. My father was the proudest of them all; he had no chance.”

Something made me say, "There was another from here whom chance held back."

She looked at me quickly. "Jamie—Jamie Pixton? Why, he went years ago, when I was very little."

I muttered, "It was sad."

She drew her hand from mine and bent to pick a sprig of dripping heather. She tucked at her laces.

"It was his choice," she replied shortly. "He has been merry enough since in all certainty. I doubt he shed tears. He left such to his mother."

I said, "An old name."

"As old as Lynden." We were walking on again, breasting the wind. "They watched the church; you have seen their name carved at the porch—an ancient heritage and he broke it."

I muttered, "Poor fool!"

She laughed. "Oh, well!" she said, "he was the last, and they were old, his people." Further on she remarked suddenly, "And I am the last, the only Lynden now."

Of course I had forgotten. She was the only living Lynden, and hers was not a name to pass too lightly into darkness. I had forgotten, but I supposed she would be always remembering; that was very right. Well, I knew my ways, my time of staying, my time of going; why think bitterly? I had nothing to do with her. Neither love nor marriage nor death had any place between us two. Nor comradeship. That, also, must go.

CHAPTER IV

I

THAT had been in autumn; and autumn came and passed again and I was still at Plover's Cove, still her steward. Such days were those! There was not anything like them. Not even the sharp memory of *The Five Wounds* in all her beauty and passion, the warm sensual loveliness of that great vast land and all those wild, reckless adventures could compare to this content, could show sweeter things than those I found in this small corner. Such was my state then I could watch out quietly for my time of departure with no greater sadness than that of a man who, having lived his life, turns about smiling to face his end. Blessed days, but not to be borne continually! I was too near to her. Circumstances brought us too closely together; for her it did not matter, but for me—it was not to be borne. It grew impossible.

Each evening I went to the house to report. Gradually I got into the habit of staying my time. In the summer we used to sit in the garden, and her old governess would click her needles over her knitting and shiver in the warm air and end by being the breaking up of our talk. Sometimes I would be glad when she interposed and gathered her skirts together and took Sorrel in with her. They were beginning to hurt, those talks. In the house, in the winter, it hurt the more.

There is too much security in walls. More than that, the tragic suggestion of a home; and I had no home. The quiet room and the hot fire scenting it with apple-tree logs; the glow of candle-light; Sorrel busy with the tea. And if she were not there and I kept waiting, still it was Sorrel's room; it held her personality as a shrine. Her spinet, her embroidery, her books, her desk, her warmth of spirit. And, outside, the snow banked high and bleak stark trees and rushing blackened clouds. And farther still the sea, and all its restless, spreading waste for me to pass as I went back to my own place. Persistent reminder of Peter the Cock, of the man with the green handkerchief at Santa Verde. You cannot escape the sea. Then suddenly I became frightened of myself, realized there was nothing to do but get away. When I looked back in the days to come, when the storm broke loose and burst upon me like water through a broken dam, I used to curse my short-sighted honesty which made me wait. But I waited. Even then I was still the fool. I waited for the calving season to pass and give some chance to Crumpleton to get another man.

They were busy enough, those weeks, for which I was grateful; it was the lambing season as well, and there was a fair-sized flock besides the cattle. There was much wind that winter and little red earth to be seen, so furious fell the snow. Also the cold was intense, and we lost heavily among the poor beasts. And then suddenly, during a lull in the storm, when the roads were become clear enough and passable, Sorrel went to Exeter. It was my moment, and I took it.

I sent a boy across the moor to Crumpleton at Bristol with a note; there was little to say, and what there was I put curtly enough. I was going abroad again. It was my wish to go the second week. Would he see immediately to appointing my successor; the sooner the better as I might then be able to show him over the place. For my part I knew a very good lad here, one Mason; I doubted if Crumpleton had heard of him, but he was known by the young mistress, and she liked him well enough. If Crumpleton would give me leave, I would further instruct him fully. I had thought there was no need to worry Miss Lynden, as he knew she was away visiting.

So I sent the note and sat down to wait. The waiting was easier once I had written, but I grudged the necessary delay. She might return; I could not bear to see her face again. I did not expect any direct answer when the boy returned, but by the end of the first week I was puzzled, by the end of the second irritated beyond endurance, by the middle of the third making ready to get away without one other word, and send Crumpleton to damnation. Maddening man not to have written. I had even expected to see him himself, for the way across the moor was clear and easy driving even for his lamentable bones. But he had not come, and now, with the snow returned with all its old fury, once again the roads would be blocked, and I knew for certain neither he nor any word would come from Bristol. But I would not stay. Neither snow nor storm would hinder. I had waited long enough; now I would make my own time.

To the surprised Mason, the very evening before the day I had decided upon, I said that I was suddenly leaving, that he would be in charge until word came from Crumpleton; I had inquired at the Hall but they had heard nothing from Miss Lynden. I cut him short when he would have burst out his amazements and distress; for I believe the fellow was genuinely fond of me. I left him at my own door and closed it on him. Yet, as it happened, I was to see him again when about midnight he appeared with many miserable supplications that I would come to Dossy, our last cow with calf, as she was in much trouble. I stormed at him; there was Jaffery, there were others, above all himself, whom I had instructed until I fancied he was as good as any man in time of emergency. Give him his due, I think it was sudden fright at being left in charge which shook him so. Then, as I had decided to wait for the first light before I started, I flung on my thickest coat and boots and struggled through the snow down to the sheds. The poor creature lay in heavy distress. She was a dun-colored beast, with sudden white markings and a fine soft coat. Of the herd she was the most gentle and had learned to follow me like my dog. It smote me deeply to see how she raised her head and fixed me with great patient eyes in which I glimpsed relief and even gratitude that I had come and, coming, her distress would end. In my furious haste I had forgotten her time, nor realized how much she depended

on me as man in turn depends upon his God. I discovered Mason a bigger fool than I had thought, or with too much temperament. I mixed her warm ale and gruel, which she sucked like a child, and not for one instant did her mild eyes leave my face. For the while there was little or nothing to be done. I banked her close in soft broken straw and sent Mason back to his bed. I judged she would be finished well by the time I wished to leave. So I rested on a barrel near the stall, and it struck me then it was better to be employed up to the very last than making a pretense at sleep.

It was very still in the shed. There were twenty there with their young, not one of which were above ten days. They made no movement beyond a sudden rustling of straw, and once the soft sucking from some calf pressing against its dam. I had been here so often of late, it occurred to me now how odd the whole business was, that I, who had done so many rough, quick things with my two hands should be in turn so depended upon by each of these helpless creatures. I had spent nights with them, and I had spent nights in all the riot of plunder. So did this difference hurt. I had a wistful thought I might find some place farther north where I might still walk and watch among these creatures. Absurd dreaming! I could not stay in England. I supposed that I should do best back at sea; they wanted men for the East India Company, I had heard. How often, I wondered, would I change in all the coming years from land to land and sea to sea?

There came a sound from Dossy which brought me

to my feet. Not long after, somewhere I judged at four o'clock, she calved, and my long watch was finished, my longer journey begun.

From her stall I passed down the shed to the door, staying a moment to stare from the window. I had not thought the world could ever look so white and still as it did this night beneath a moon as round and shining as a silver penny. Stark trees, like dead black fingers, pointing to the sky; no wind, no movement; the beauty of a land hushed down to sleep. I remembered long ago, in one of his tragic sober moments, the passionate cry of Jamie.

"No snow out here! That's what I miss, the snow! I be scorched body and soul by this sun. An' it never changes; this sun, this bloody sun. They've all the luck over Somerset; they've the snow."

And I thought now: "Look your last; look now, poor fool. You'll be saying that, feeling that, soon. Make the best of it; it's your last."

I took down the lantern and turned up the collar of my coat; I had best be going. I had my hand on the latch, turning for one instant to stare back at Dossy, now blessed in sweet content with her calf, when the door rattled against me, pressing in with much force. I swung round, startled and angry, expecting Mason, finding—Sorrel!

3

She came straight into the shed, shutting the door behind her. She was breathing heavily as if she had been running; she held a lantern, which she put on a

box, and swung quickly to confront me. She gave me no time to speak. Indeed, I was dumb with amazement. But she cried immediately:

"Well, well, well! What is this? What does it mean? This—this foolishness!"

And I still could only stare at her. I do not think, except that first time I saw her at Santa Verde, I had ever been so amazed. And she went on, scorn and derision in her voice:

"And you are the man who said he needed quiet; you are the man who swore himself my servant, yet when my back is turned, makes for the running without one word." She repeated furiously, "Without one word to me."

With a great effort, I answered: "It was impossible! I could not tell you." And then, with a sudden fear that she might question so wild a statement, I went on hurriedly: "It was my business to tell Crumpleton. He was your agent; he engaged me."

She asked, "And what am I? I think you are talking nonsense."

She stood farther away and loosened her cloak so it fell back on her shoulders. I could see her skirts were wet and stained, while here and there clung melting snow.

She said harshly, "When were you going?"

I said, "To-morrow; that is, this morning."

She repeated, "This morning." She asked, "Why are you here now?"

I told her. She held up the lantern again, and with it, swung on high, walked the whole length of the shed

peering in at each, stopping where Dossy lay, to bend the closer in and murmur to the beast. She turned to me.

"You were with Dossy to-night?"

I nodded. "Just leaving her."

She looked again down the length of the stalls and said, "And you have been these last days and nights with all these, twenty of them, each new since I went away." She came nearer to me and stared right in my face. "What does this mean, Peter? What have I done to you?"

I said, unsteadily, "You must not ask me that; you must never ask me that."

She leaned against a rail, her head turned upward with its old gesture of defiance, her eyes holding mine with the same brave questioning gleam. She whispered: "I do not understand. Why did you write to Crumpleton?"

I muttered, "He told you?"

She nodded, "And I came from Exeter to see for myself."

I said lamely, "The drifts, they were dangerous, they—"

She stopped me, "Do not matter, are of no account. Why are you leaving me?"

I said desperately, "My own business—I cannot say."

She made a movement of appeal with her hands. "Is it so dull?" she cried with sudden vehemence. "Oh, this is not like you. I never expected this—this mystery. And you will go back, is that it? Back to your land, your roughness, your wild adventuring. I might

have said back to your women, but I think I know you better. And I think you lie to yourself and, most of all, lie to me when you pretend you want to go. What does it all mean?"

I said: "I dare not tell you. Perhaps I am a bigger liar than you think, yet I am being true for once when I tell you I must go."

She whispered, "Even if I asked you to stay?"

I cried savagely: "Why did you come back? It was not fair. By God, it was not fair! Ah! let me go. I beseech you let me go. It is not kind to question. I am your servant; one does not question servants. They are but paid to come and go."

She said, "Is that all?"

I turned to the door. "There is no more."

And I thought, "This would be easier going if I had courage now to remind her of a different dismissal she had once spoken far from here." I might have done it, but this was my last moment, and I held the thought that I had in my foolish way pleased her during my service. It would be some sort of happiness to think she held me with certain kindness once I had gone. So I held my tongue and bent to the latch. It was very dark, or so I thought; I could hardly see. And then I heard her speaking, sharp and clear.

"Are all so dull?" She seemed suddenly very close, and I could not find the latch. She whispered, "Must I do the asking?" And suddenly her hands fumbled out until they caught my coat. She was crying, with a sob:

"Ah! you must stay—I love you, Peter!"

4

It had been my father once who had raved and threatened with the cry, "A new heaven and a new earth!" Poor fool! Poor mad old fool! The thing is in the heart of man himself, rather than in the coming or passing of worlds. We were married in May. She came to me that morning to the church through fields of daffodils, and when we left I know some threw young spring flowers and boughs of May for her to walk upon, and all the spring, I think, shone in her face. And afterward they all came to the Hall, a motley, eager crew. Fishermen, farmers, drovers, and shepherds, and all their women in their prettiest colored gowns; and when they were collected on the lawn she spoke to them. Not very much, but just some few words: but I, who stood beside her, in all the years to come heard that clear proud cry:

"This is my husband; there is no foreignness; he is a man known to you. My name is changed now, but Lynden—Lynden is the same, only with this difference: I share it with one other and with a greater pride, for you are to remember it is not only mine but my husband's."

I stood on the steps at her side and felt her palm pressed to mine, and watched their gay, friendly faces and heard their boisterous shouts of welcome to the new lord of the manor and his bride. Some of them, possibly one of those older men and women must have stood that night with Jamie and gaped in the cold when her father had held her out and cried, "This is my

daughter, my daughter . . .” So Jamie had told me before we sacked Santa Verde. Just how grotesque is life he would never know, yet he had been very near to her that day he swung his great red sword and soused himself in wine in those Spanish cellars. But God knows his grief had been deep while he struggled with his thoughts, and I hardly listened. And I had been the one to steal the march and stand closer in than he stood that night; while he had no more than his poor blurred memories, and even they would go one day, as he went on and down his dull bewildered path.

Yet I knew him for the more honest of us two, the better man. Had I gone to him that last night at Isola Sound and told my wild scheming, he would not have come. I think he would have cursed my offer, then watched the brig go out, sobbing and crooning over his drink.

The better man. I told her nothing. Not even in the ecstasy of that moment in the shed could I have spoken. And if not then, how was it possible now? For those old black days I cared but little. Men had done worse things than I, and their women had forgiven them. I might have said, “This and that I did, and such a one am I . . .” I dared now think she would not shun me. I was knowing Sorrel. I was learning my wife. It was Santa Verde I feared. It was our first meeting I prayed most passionately she would never know of. The remembrance of her face in the guest-house as it looked at me in the little white room, as it stared after me down the hill when I had raced on with my father and left her with a dead man sprawl-

ing at her feet. My kill, and she had seen me do it. Later, I supposed, she had come out into the town and seen it after we had left—after I had left. She was mine now. I wanted her. I needed her. If I would keep her she must never know the horror of that meeting, whose face that green handkerchief hid at Santa Verde. For I saw myself again meeting her scorn, I saw myself rushing through space, outcast, nameless, homeless. At such a revelation there could be no forgiveness. I knew that; I had known it all along; and there were times when I wished to God I did not swagger so with Chance.

But for the while I had this page turned over, I began to see the subtlety of life. There must be digging through time and tribulation; there must be seeking all the while before there comes complete understanding of the goodness of the years.

The goodness of the years—with Sorrel. Near to her before, yet nearer now. Beholding her a new and glorious wonder, beholding her in all her womanhood as something strange yet marvelous in her strangeness. Learning her moods, her graces, discovering her joys, her sorrows, her sudden shyness and her quick warm passion, her love of life and all the wayward beauty of her living. Yet, most of all, I think I loved her as a symbol of the soil. She was that rarest thing, a traveled woman, yet with her spirit caught and held secure by the ripe earth. She was that sweetest thing, a woman who would bend to soothe and tend its generous beauty as a mother will stoop to caress her child; and

like a child, it seemed to stir and smile beneath her hands, mark for her laughter, wait for her feet, scent her about with soft warm fragrance, and beckon on the winds to stroke her face and shout the love-song in her ears. Red earth, red heather, red deer. She walked the fields, and all the fields made answer; and all the gods who order these things sighed and bent the closer to watch her pass.

So I can close my eyes and still remember her in harvest-time, using the sickle with us against that yellow wall of corn or marching behind with the women to gather it in, her bare arms clasping sheaf upon sheaf to her breast as if to bless it while it rested there. She went like a boy then; eager and flushed, joyous and free; moving among the workers to chide or to encourage; joining with the hungry groups to eat bread and meat and drink cider from the great pewter mugs. She was the freshest of us all; she moved a radiant living thing among the bowing corn. Later I saw her wrapped in the evening light, 'solitary, like Ruth among the corn, staring away beyond the yellowness to where the great red moor gaped like a hungry monster to its very edge. Then 'she had changed. The boyish ease seemed shed. She stood as if in mute appeal to all that golden light and held communion with it. Later when we two turned alone 'between the sheaves back to the house she told me; and in her telling I could see her eyes lit up as if the stars were gathered there. The beauty of her face then made me catch my breath for wonder. I think I would have

knelt, but her hands held me; and we walked on together through the still evening, lit only by a great copper moon.

5

Where summer walked and shone his flaming heels, there now came dark melancholy days when all the world lay down to brood on what might follow. It was as if some enormous hand had stripped the land from 'end to end and left it dead and naked with no comfort for its desolation but a wind to cut like steel and harsh dull skies. A gray chill sea which churned and moaned, like endless sighing souls.

There were some I knew who grumbled at the bleakness of that winter and the dismal monotony of the nights and days; they were poor creatures, I was sorry for them; to me those short months before 'our child was born were of great sweetness. Once before I had envied men their homes; the peace of a room, the quiet of a 'house, the security of walls. Eskdale had started that mood; Sorrel had answered it. I could stretch my legs to the warmth of my hearth and watch the flames cast shadows on her face; I could listen to the rain lashing the windows and hear her voice make sweeter still the shadowed room. In the stillness I could mark her new strange beauty. I could see her eyes grow wise, as, woman-like, she dreamed her own mystery.

There passed from me then all the old ugliness; I could dream enchantment, and such enchanting gladness. I could forget. That is the way of man, to forget—what folly!

There had come, one day, much rain driven by a racing wind; toward the evening it dropped, only to break again with renewed force a few hours later. I think there is nothing so desperate as a great wind round a house, but it has a peculiar strangeness when it whines and snarls its way inside. In the Hall that night it played a headlong game of riot. Down the dim corridors it came with a rush and a rattle of doors, to pass like a living, screaming thing to some distant part, and linger there sighing and sobbing as if most desperately seeking some refuge, and, finding none, would burst its headlong way again. We piled the logs that night until the candle-light seemed but a small thing to the flare of that great fire, and now and again it would spurt and hiss to the sudden rain down the huge chimney.

It had been her way to go up earlier these last nights. This one she lingered. We had the old governess staying then, and I remember how twice she came to the door and tried to urge her up-stairs, and each time she would not come; and I know how at the last she hovered up and down the stairs like a distracted bird muttering to herself, until, as if suddenly roused, Sorrel sent me out with the message she was not to wait: "I will not be long. Bid her to her own bed, Peter." And when I talked of being tired, shook her head in the old impatient way: "Oh, faith, have done! I am not tired, I am too much awake; I could not sleep."

When I came back from soothing the old lady and sending her off with much shaking of the head and lamentations, she was leaning forward in her chair

staring into the fire. She looked up when I came in, smiling.

"Well, has she gone? Was she vexed? I do not think I like so much kindness. Does that shock you, Peter? I want nothing but this next hour with you. Sit down; no, not near me; in your old seat. I can see you there; I want to see you to-night."

I started to speak, but she interrupted me. "You are not to talk, Peter; that is for me. I have something to say, and I must say it to-night. I want to confess to you."

She was staring at me, her face cupped in her hand, her body nearly all in shadow. She repeated, watching me closely, "To confess."

I would have laughed on any other occasion, but there was a curious look in her eyes such as I had not seen before; it held me quiet.

I said, "Confess? That word has nothing to do with you."

She shook her head. "It has, it has! When I have finished you will know there was no other choice. And if I was a better woman I should have told you long ago what I will say to-night, and if I had been honest I might have trusted you and told you—" She paused and looked away from me into the fire. I questioned:

"When?"

She answered, still staring away, "The night we first met at the Boar and Hound." She said sharply before I could reply: "You loved me even then; I saw it in your eyes. If I had spoken that evening, I

might not have hurt you as I will now; but I suppose I did not think, and women—women are hard.”

I said, “What had you to say?”

She said dully: “Little enough to tell, but much to ask. Yet I think that even you would have done the thing.” She cried out with sudden violence: “I thank God my vanity held my tongue that night! I might have lost you, Peter; and had that happened I would have lost love itself.”

I questioned, “What was this thing?”

She said, “To kill a man.”

I asked, “What man?”

She answered, “They called him the Cock. He killed my father.”

6

I seemed to be shrouded in immense darkness, and that darkness divided into two parts; so there ran a chasm between, and through that chasm went the wind. Whistling and whining, up and down, up and down. And through this darkness came a thin tiny voice, Sorrel's voice; what was she saying?

“He killed my father; they called him the Cock, and he killed my father.”

No. It was not that; she had said that hours and hours ago. This was something else; this was her voice, but she was saying other things. It would be better to listen.

“. . . There was a Spanish cousin on my mother's side, very distant, but we claimed his kinship. He was

governor of a town in South America, Santa Verde; it was used as a port to ship treasure out to Spain."

Santa Verde. Why, of course, Santa Verde! We had sacked the town and spitted its men. We had done very well out of Santa Verde. But this was England. This was Lynden Hall; this was the big parlor, warm and inclosed by quiet security. That was Sorrel! That was my wife, and she was speaking—she was speaking of Santa Verde. What was it? Better listen.

"My father had this madness for cattle, like his father before him and my great-grandfather. My father went further than they; he had this wish to cross with foreign blood. So we went to the plantations, and from there he had a scheme to get down to La Plata and try to ship back some of those wild beasts. He claimed our relationship with this cousin, who was very kind; we stayed at Santa Verde."

She paused. I could see her now quite clearly and listen clearly. I was conscious then of a curious sensation as if I had been waiting years to hear her tell me this; it was not new but very old.

She repeated, "Santa Verde." She went on: "We were greatly hindered; they were Spanish, and we at war with Spain; there was the difficulty of the shipping; and then at the end, when through my cousin's kindness he settled it, the pirates came!" She sighed and laughed. "How futile it all was! My father's eager coming and his proud delight at what we were taking back. The risk my cousin ran with his runners to get to terms with some English trader, and, when at last

the thing was done and we but waited for the day to march along the coast to where the ship would wait—these others came—the Cock and his companions.”

She cried vehemently: “But he was insolent, that fellow! You would have thought him so had you seen him standing at my door, his coward face wrapped round in silk, his English tongue with its insolent lies of gallantry. I tell you, Peter, you would have thought him beast enough, and so did I! But when he stooped to kill my father at my side and then ran—ran on his coward feet from that poor dead body and my weakness, I thought him lower than the common swine that scrape about the dirt and lie in their own filth. He killed my father. More than that, he killed my young beliefs, my faith; he made me different—different.

“They sacked the town. There was not one man left. Not even my cousin; him they also killed. And then they went. They might have stayed. It was but mockery, their going.”

She looked at me, holding me with those fearless eyes, puckering her forehead, and bending forward as if to explain the better each word she spoke:

“They only went because the Spanish force farther inland came after them; they were gone when they came in, and the Spaniards followed. They told me later there was a pitched battle on the beach, but they lost; the pirates got away. They lost—they came back with nothing, they came back to nothing. An empty town; a few dying men, a few smoldering houses;

there was nothing there but me." She said distinctly, "I was there."

"They were beaten men, and they had let the treasure of the Escorial slip through their fingers. There was nothing for them to do but wait; the rest was between them and Spain when her ships came. So they waited, and I with them. They had their leader, a cool, subtle man; I see him now with his pointed feathered hat and a gold chain about his neck. He was vastly proud of that chain and fingered it the while he talked, and let it slip about his fingers as a woman with her pearls, and let the sun gloss on its jewels and gleam like his eyes. I was English, he Spanish. I was to him no better than any woman of his streets. I had no God, remember, like his God; I was outcast, heretic. At first I think his manners had the better part of him; then he forgot, or rather remembered me as a woman. He used to watch me, all the while running his fingers about his chain. Later I made excuses to avoid him; that was foolish. Later still he bargained with me, like one trader with another he wished to deal; he was that kind. He had my answer, and I had his. That evening they laid their tables in the plaza and in the moonlight there ate and drank and sang and jested until some fell asleep upon the stones. He made me wait on them. I took the dishes; I took the wine. I filled their glasses and their plates, and all the while I dodged their hands, their looks, their talk, their strength. And at the end they put me on the table to be sold. I was worth money; I had no other worth.

And all this while I thought only of one man, the one who had killed my father—him they called the Cock!"

7

Again the wind. The thin whine, coming from corner to corner, pressing the doors, staggering the candle-light. And as if to answer it from the outside, its muffled roar drummed against the house, hummed round and round again like a monstrous bird beating at the windows as it passed.

She went on: "They were too drunk for this new sport; afterward they were too late. In the early light the square was full of Spaniards fresh from their ship in the bay. Her commander was very kind to me, an old man and very tender about my loss; yet even he never knew how much I had lost. I do not think I knew myself until I met you face to face that night at Bampton Fair."

She said: "You must be kind to me, Peter; you must remember me as I am now, not as I was then—had you known it. Women are soft, you think? Gentle and merciful, generous and kind? Those things I might have been, those I pray God I am now; but if I have a son I would remind him there is a subtlety in women their graces cover. When I came back from Santa Verde I had but one thought, but one memory. All day, all night, I used to think, to dream, of that one man, the Cock. See his muffled face, hear his smooth tongue, see again his quick hand speed my dear father to his death; and all the while I used my

woman's cunning how to make him answer for the horror he had made of my life. Woman's cunning! To find a man and make him, like a dog, do this and that, fetch here and there, until at last I saw him eager on his search to give my answer to the Cock.

“And I knew that night at the Boar and Hound I had found that man, because I saw you loved me even then. I hurt you? Will you be different now? Ah! But I know you, I know myself; how deep runs the change within my heart. But then—why, I but saw you as an easy tool; in every way you answered. There was not one mean thing, I think, you would not have done for me had I but told you. I had counted on so much, and your eyes gave me answer more than I had thought. From then I watched with such care, with such subtlety, and I thought so well. I had forgotten one thing, myself. When I heard from Crumpleton you were going I knew; I could not let you go. I could not send you out to kill. I could not let you leave my sight. I only wanted you, I only loved you. If you had gone from me that night I would have followed you, and had you turned from me, still followed, loving your shadow. For there is one thing more subtle than women, and that is love itself.”

She got to her feet and stood looking down on me, and her eyes were again lit with the same beauty I had seen that day in the corn.

“You are to stay there,” she said. “Not to come with me. I want to be alone. I want to think of you in your chair in that corner as I have so often seen you, as I see you now. I had to tell you this

because at this time there must be nothing between us! I had to tell you because this is a proper moment for you to judge me. But whatever you think I shall not mind; I shall only love your thoughts. For each one of them I thank God, and not even God can stand between you and me."

She seemed to leave the room before I put my hands up to her to bid her stay. I remember staggering to my feet and crying, "Sorrel, Sorrel!" But she had gone. It was to an empty room and a closed door I cried out:

"Nothing between us, not even God . . ." O words, words! How they mocked me! Even God had no part in this. Even God between could not hide the body of her father, her shame. The thing had come in on me greater than I had expected; the secret I had stored down to hide from her was as nothing compared to this most dreadful one of hers. And she had picked on me to be the one to answer her insult; she had chosen me to seek out myself, my other viler self, whom I had thought to pitch overboard those years back—and tear away that handkerchief from that vile face. Because she loved me, she could not let me go. My very self must stare at me across those years and mock me with her words, "I could not send you out to kill."

A log fell from the fire and crashing to the ground spat up one leaping flame, then lay and smoldered. From above stairs there came a sound of feet and crash of doors. Later I heard feet outside and later still the clatter of hoofs over the stone pavement.

I went out into the hall. It was very quiet there. The candles were still lit, and even by their dim light I could see the portraits of dead and gone Lyndens staring through the shadows. I had murdered a Lynden and wedded one. A Lynden might be born this very night and know what hand had put its mother to most desperate shame. I went back to the room—Sorrel's room, and all her things about, and all her spirit enshrined there. And she had suffered me to share it with her; she had brought me there and made it mine with hers. I saw it full of sweetness, full of courage. Not mine, but hers.

The candles had burned nearly away. I went from each to each and put them out. I pulled the curtains and stared into the gray morning light. A cold dead world, with great pools of water lying here and there, with broken grass and dripping barren trees. The wind had hushed down; it was the sea I heard. It was the sea I saw clearer even than the sodden earth.

Endless space of water, restless churning waste, never changing, never ending, never ceasing. You cannot get away from the sea. There is so much that comes from it, there are so many who go out with it. I had watched it too long, I knew it too well, and it knew me. I thought to hear its trumpeting now, its mocking salutation.

“Hey! Thou Peter the Cock! Art thou forgetting? We have much to say to each other—thou and I, thou and I . . .”

And it must have been at that hour our son was born.

CHAPTER V

I

LOOKING back on the horror of that moment and all those silent days which followed while Sorrel lay so ill, I marvel at my own quiet and the method with which I trained my mind. Yet after all I suppose it was very simple. I had killed her father, and I was her husband. In that old life I had killed many and forgotten them; some in fighting, all in attack; always had there been the old brutish law of gain. Yet they were as nothing, and I could still contemplate them as such. But her father, I had murdered him, and Sorrel was my wife. I had built our love on a game of pretense, on a multitude of lies. She called me Peter and husband. I had no name but the Cock; and to her the Cock had degraded her most vilely.

Odd, too, how great a part my father had in this, how he still stalked me down the years. He had stolen my youth, he had stolen my love; I had but killed her father for mine. If between father and son there holds a bond, I had been faithful to my part. I had turned murderer for that same flesh and blood who trained me for no better use than winning nicknames to suit my different tricks. Well, here was one, "Cain"; who would deny its excellence?

It gave me relief that through her weakness we

two could not be so frequently together as of old. I wanted all my time to think; I wanted each moment to plan, to make up for those last and wasted days when I had waited for the calving, and lingered too long. There was the child; that was best of all. Here would be comfort for Sorrel; in him she might forget this disgrace; there at last would her love find anchor. For she did love me; I knew that. I knew no man could come her way and have that first fresh passion; "good measure pressed down and running over . . ." That was Sorrel. But she had given it to Peter Comfort, and that was not my name. I was the Cock; there should be nothing but the spitting mob for the Cock.

When she was down again, full of her old careless way, I asked her once, as a weak youth will stumble round a question, straining his whole soul for the answer, yet having no pluck to put it straight:

"This fellow, the Cock, what of him, now?"

And she answered lightly, pressing against me as she clung to my arm, "Oh, faith, 't is done. I am tamed, now that blackness is past." She sighed and pressed in closer; she added gravely: "There was no worth in him, not even the worth of reckoning with. He was always nothing. I can sometimes even think of him as that and give him pity."

Pity! She could give that as one might to a beggar or the last journeying in the hangman's cart. There was no worth in him; he was worthy of nothing else, not even death.

There came the time when I made ready for my

departure. There was a letter to write, and then the thing was done. I had determined to leave one night when she was asleep; then suddenly Sorrel made matters easier by wishing to go to Porlock to see her governess. She would go early one morning and sleep the night, to return in the evening of the next day. When she came back I would be gone; this time I would see to it there was no hitch.

She went in the pale early light when all the stillness of the night was passing, and somewhere a blackbird sang as if he could not bear the loveliness of life. I watched her cross from the rough path to the moor, and as she topped the ridge she turned to wave to me, and then the long red line of heather hid her from sight. I took good care that day to be out of the house the whole while. For that reason I rode to fields some miles away to inspect young stock. I remember vividly the sudden fury of a bull during ringing; his crimson eyes, his froth-flecked coat, his plunging baffling hoofs, and the wild crashing of Mason, bellowing with pain and rage as the beast hooked him, spinning him through the bushes. And I remember even more vividly when we had done the whole herd rounding of one accord to rush in a cloud of dust to the end of the field to turn to stare with tiny smoldering eyes and tossing heads, half defiant, half shy, yet each one troubled with perplexity.

Very late that night I started the letter. Once I had settled to it, it struck me what hours I had wasted in thought. There was nothing to say; why write at length? "I am the Cock; I killed your father; I suf-

ferred your degradation . . .” That was all. It was very quiet in the room. Almost as still as the sharp sudden quiet which happened between Eskdale and me when he had whispered, “*There was a woman; she had a son . . .*” Well, I had failed them both. My mother’s love, his faith. All wasted. I was my father’s son; I was my father’s blood.

Later I left the house. I had folded and sealed the letter. There was nothing to do but get my way and be gone. Nothing to take but my hat and stick; no one to take leave of, for there was not one soul, not even my child, who had a right to listen to my farewells. I walked across the dewy grass and past a bank of pale young primroses; there was a haze over the sea, and it lay wrinkled and placid as if half slumbering. I passed through the old broken arch to the cliff toward the moor; it was as I turned the bend I noticed a curious strangeness among the gulls.

They seemed centered about a point where it sloped down to the sand and where an old boat lay bottom upward. There were numbers of them circling the air, straining their necks and crying wildly to each other. As I came up they flew the higher with a whirl of wings and then down again, some passing me, their evil red eyes glittering in the light, others turning to hover and cry again by the old boat.

When I was near enough I saw a man stretched there. He lay on his face with his arms stretched above his head, his legs naked, his shirt torn, and the dew had soaked into the red of the handkerchief about his waist, staining the grass. I think I knew who it was before

I bent to touch him. I think I guessed the matter while I turned him on his back. It was Three-Pint Jamie, come home again. And despite the blood on his mouth his lips were smiling, and despite the wound in his neck he lay easily. Had he lain in the churchyard I doubt he could have felt a better peace than on this rough red earth he knew was Somerset.

2

I sat on the edge of the boat and stared down at the dead face. After all, I was not to go; they had come for me. I might have realized how grim a truth lay behind Pascal's gaiety: "We have our custom; no man goes too long . . ." I do not think even when I had started out upon this venture I thought over-seriously of that threat. Had I lingered there, either miles away inland or furlongs down the coast, it would have been different; I knew how crafty their sense of smell was. But here!

I thought grimly: They must have loved that fellow Peter the Cock, Peter the Red. They must have loved him very well to have traped all these miles through an English sea. What dispute was it this time to be spoken of face to face?

Poor Jamie. Poor weak fool with the babbling tongue and the parched throat. This time he had spoken too much; this time he had made them fear his chattering. For I had not the slightest doubt that they had tracked me through him; it was too easy to suppose otherwise; my only amazement was I had not thought it before. A matter of custom, that was all;

a matter of habit, and I had trained him. I was reminded of those old talks on *The Five Wounds* at Isola Sound, and sometimes in a tavern at some port. I used to listen. I suffered his babbling where others would stop his mouth or laugh; while the fit held him he knew he might come to me. I would drowse sleepily and make pretense at hearing; it satisfied him. That was before Santa Verde; afterward, with all the remembrance of Sorrel and that he knew her, I used to encourage him overmuch. I would egg him on and on and on, until his poor crazed brain refused, and he would suck in tears as well as drink, and his despair was then as great as mine. Later, when I began to fear we might be overheard and so avoided him, he did not understand. He would sit stupid and bewildered like a child and souse himself in drink and fits of temper. But I supposed he was still waiting for a further confidence; the old habit must have remained; it needed very little to start him in full. I wondered how they caught him. I should learn soon enough.

Three-Pint Jamie! The man with the long sword, the man with the wide throat. The fellow of great recklessness and wolfish brutality; the one whom we would toast again and again after some venture for his extravagant daring, his loose boastful tongue. Three-Pint Jamie! Different here somehow. Rather the awkward mischievous boy; birds'-nesting, fishing, chasing the deer, robbing the orchards; and, as I must always remember, standing with raw hands and stunned blue eyes, his pale straggling hair about his cold damp face, stamping in the snow and singing his very heart

away outside Lynden Hall that Christmas evening when Sorrel was born before he went across the sea to pitch his voice to other tunes. And the night they sighted Plover's Cove they must have seen that new strange light mount to his face; they must have caught a fresh odd tone to his voice; they must have watched him closely and marked his eager straining toward the shore. It was not their business to hinder him. Possibly they sent him off alone, only seeing to it that one was with him as he stumbled ashore to save his feet from being too nimble, to stop his eager tormented soul crying out in ecstasy. And yet, whoever it was, he could not prevent the boyish awkward smile of Jamie Pixton, forever sealing his face as, pitched to the grass, he lay pressed down to the earth.

3

It was full morning now but still very dim, with the haze about the sea. I wanted to penetrate that haze. I wanted to see what lay beyond. Somewhere there moved the brig. I must get out to the brig before Sorrel returned. I went at last down to the village, stopping on the way at the sexton's to tell him I had discovered a dead body up on the cliff path.

Then I went down the ragged street to where the boats clustered, drawn well in from the sea. I went among the men and told them of the body and questioned them if they had seen a strange craft while out that night. It appeared they had; a brig new to them with no name. She hailed them, but with their usual care they had kept away; with the morning and the

haze they had lost her. No, not one of them had seen her since. So I went away and passed along the moor to where it butted out to sea like a huge shoulder and so to its opposite side where I could see the sea for miles, but there was no ship in sight, neither did the haze lift. And for all that day I marched the cliffs and prayed for the mist to rise, yet though at one time it seemed as if it would, it appeared only to settle in the more, and by the evening it had thickened and the light died early, and I knew there was nothing for it but to wait. This time I must tell Sorrel.

They might be anywhere. That was the thing which terrified me. In this fading light they might be hidden close at hand, and I was the only thing between them and Sorrel. Why in God's name did they not come out boldly and have done with it? Why hang about and prolong my suspense? There could be no more than ten on the brig, and I could summon thirty or more lusty men about the house if need be. That was not the thing; I could not trust those ten—nor eight, nor five, nor one if need be. Theirs was a devilish cunning. There was only one thing which steadied me then. For some miles along our coast there were but two places a boat could come in: one at the small harbor in the village, and that I knew they would not try; the other where they had tossed Jamie and where I knew some had already landed. I would keep watch there. I would send five of our men out across the moor to meet Sorrel and stand there myself until I saw her safely housed; and when I had told her, when I had seen her safe in her room and warned the men, I would

get back to the gap and wait there for their coming. After all, it was easy enough.

Sorrel came back when the light was nearly gone, wet from the mist, but radiant with happiness. I met her at the gap and walked at her side to the house. I made the watchman there bar up the gates and bade him watch the whole night through with his blunderbuss. It was in the hall I spoke to Sorrel. She had been mocking me for all my care, and I had laughed with her. Now I was very quiet and in deadly earnest. I said:

"There is something I must say to you now. Will you come into the library and listen?"

She looked at me surprised, pulling off her gloves and tossing them to a chair. "Now?"

I said, "This very moment."

She said: "Why, Peter, why not afterward? Afterward, when I have changed?"

I shook my head. "No! It must be now. There has been too much waiting; it must be now."

She took the long pins from her hat and put them with her gloves yet with a quieter gesture. "Very well, my dear, now. What is it, Peter?" she said again when we were in the room. "What is it?"

I can see her now sitting in the corner of the window in a great leather chair, her hands folded in her lap, her eyes very wide and very serious.

The room was a great part in shadow; light about the two of us only. Even the garden was darkening. I felt suddenly very old; I had been living surely for ages; I had been struggling for years, always against

myself. Yet it appeared to me even now I must go on. If they wanted me for the shallows, then they wanted my living body. Until that died I should just go on, and I wanted badly to find an end to it all.

Life without Sorrel. That is what it would mean. Nothing more was worth the while; and this was our parting. I looked down on her, the looseness of her coat where it fell away at her throat, the way her laces tumbled about her wrists, the shadows already beginning to embrace her; and I remembered again the loveliness of her shadowed arm flung out against the wall at Santa Verde, and I remembered instantly that it was about Santa Verde I had brought her here to talk. It was as if a dagger pricked me into life, that thought of the cool room, and our first meeting. I cried to her:

"I was leaving you this very day. I wrote a letter telling you all. I would have gone from you by now, but things—things have come in too fiercely; I must tell you myself and then be gone." I drew myself up so that my body pressed hard against the panels. And in a voice that sounded strange. So queerly was it pitched, I said:

"Sorrel, I am Peter the Cock. I spoke to you at Santa Verde. I killed your father. I caused you assault. And I followed you out here, lying to you time and again because of your face, because I desired to see your face again."

No sound came from her after her first cry; only the shadows seemed to envelop her in a closer embrace.

My heart failed me. There was nothing else to be said; I should have gone then, for I had no further story to tell; everything that mattered I had spoken. I suppose it was the knowledge I should never see her again that made me struggle beyond that bold statement. There would be no such chance again, and I owed it to my son it should be told.

And so I told her, stumbling with my words. I never knew my father; my mother fled from him; how later she ran abroad with a Jacobite; I was left with my aunt. In thought I was with Bride again, in the musty old warehouse! great leather-bound books in front of me, stacks of goods piled together, tobacco in great painted barrels. Ships' captains swaggering in with rings in their ears and oaths on their lips, and talk of this and that cargo taken or won. Of strange ships seen and lost again, and stranger towns lying in ruins behind vast swamps and heaped-up bones and all the silence of lost endeavor. I was with my aunt again that night, watching my father over the glass and silver, hearing the rushing sea ring in my ears, smelling its salt afresh with every breath of his. That old gray wanton sea, that careless beauty with the golden voice, the look of mirage on her mighty face, now still, now furious, now silent, now trumpeting; and all her bosom bare and wonderful to those who called her mistress. I tumbled this out in a kind of frenzy.

"My father," I cried out suddenly. "Not all his fault, not all. There was a mystery that bound me, too; there was the sea, and only those who go down

on the sea know her magic and how mad a man can be; and there was the ship. I could not break away from her; I think I was bewitched."

And even as I spoke, I thought: "Why did I say that? Did I have one thought she might forgive me?"

I went on: "I cannot explain. I was caught up by that life. It prisoned me. The hot yellow sands and the stiff tall palm-trees; forests that shut you in; colored birds and colored flowers; the blueness of the sea; the moon above the sea; and what might lie beyond. Men would come in and talk of it. Not decent men. Yet even they saw its mystery. It would lure you to strange, distant places, beckon to you as I have seen women beckon to men, and we would go out for its secret; and we would spread sail and follow down this track and that; and sometimes there would be nothing and again there would be something.

"Santa Verde—that was why we went to Santa Verde. And you were there, and instantly the magic went out of it all, became dim and remote like slow lost music, and I saw you and nothing else. I killed your father because of mine. His life or my father's; I was the son. My God, my God! I never knew, but if I had I think I still must have killed him to save my own. I followed you to be near you; that was all. If I had known I would have stayed with my own kind. I never knew and I came. Sorrel, Sorrel! Why did you come to me that night? Why did you not let me go? I told you as much as I dared. I should have dared more and told you all, but I wanted to keep your face as I saw it in the mist at Bampton Fair, not as it looked at

Santa Verde. I had no courage to see you change—change to look at me as you had stared upon the Cock. Now, now, now it is dark, and in the darkness I can go, unable to see your face; able to cheat myself to the last, it has not changed, and I can hold its memory as I last saw it when you turned and waved your hand from the ridge on the moor. I may go like that kneeling to you, because I know your feet have touched this wood, putting my hands just once upon your dress that they, too, may go back to their work with memory.”

I hardly knew what I was saying. I only knew I was very tired, and I wanted to be finished; I stumbled to my knees, but when I put my hands out there was nothing, only the chair inclosed in shadows. She had slipped away.

4

I got to my feet very slowly. I was extraordinarily tired. They were waiting for me outside. It did not do to keep them waiting. Sorrel had run from me; I had expected no less. I dragged out to the hall, with its crackling wood fire and the portraits of the dead Lyndens about the wall.

An exclamation from the head of the staircase made me look up. A maid stood there staring down at me with round bewildered eyes and open mouth. It was no wonder; I must have looked half crazed to her. So she should think nothing strange, I called to her, and my voice seemed cracked like a broken instrument, “Is your mistress in her room?”

She gave a gasp which might have been relief at my

voice or astonishment at its tone. "No, sir; she went into the garden."

"Out? Out? What do you mean, girl?"

She gasped again; I think she was thoroughly frightened by now.

"Why, sir, indeed she did. I watched her run over the grass—I was coming after her with this cloak."

"You should not have let her go. You should have stayed with her. Give me the cloak." I sprang up and caught it from her, and she squeaked like a rat.

"There! Close your mouth; you did not know. These bars—help me with these bars; what fool clamped them so?" I was wrestling with the great door, tearing my fingers at its huge bolts and chains, and then, as it swung wide, out into the mist and away down the approach. If I had any hope for her safety it had gone when I reached the gateway. It was open wide; and huddled on his face, strapped like a pig, lay the keeper; from an up-stairs room the groans and hysterical cries of his wife. I gave them no thought; what I saw was sufficient to delay me only to unhook the lantern on the post and run down to the gap.

The mist clung like cotton-wool. It hindered my running, for I could not see one inch before me, and the ground was rough and treacherous. I got to the break and started down the loose path to the sand; I noticed as I went Jamie was not there. I hoped the sexton had moved him. It was not from the grass above I hoped to find traces but rather on the smooth sand, for the tide was out; and there I was successful. Not only foot-marks, many of them, but the line of a

boat dragged in from the sea, and then, breaking from it, its obvious run down again. I went right down to the water's edge, so that it lapped against my feet. It was like staring through a thick curtain. I could neither see nor hear; the fog seemed to have locked away all sound; there was nothing but complete desolation and the listless surge of the sea.

Yet they had her out there. They held her and waited there for me; they had played their game with a very great cunning; so far they had won.

I went back up the sand to the cliff. We kept a boat chained there; I had often used it with Sorrel. I took my coat off and dropped it inside with the lantern, unhitched the chain, and ran it down to the sea. In a second I was pushing out with the water up to my knees; I was drawing on the oars.

To search for a ship in such density, to grope in the darkness, with sea-mist stinging my eyes, with sea-mist muffling my ears, with sea-mist closing all around me until I could see not even the end of my boat, only very dimly the lantern I had put there. There could be no quest so forlorn as this. Sorrel was on the brig; one woman among so many men, one woman with Pascal, Pascal—I pulled upon the oars with greater sharpness. I must get to her before she stayed too long with Pascal. And still the mist held. For all my pulling I knew I was drifting aimlessly; I was caged and prisoned in its shadows. Again and again I leaned on my oars to listen. Surely from behind that great white shroud there must come some sound of the brig? They would be strange to the coast; they

would be helpless in this fog; besides, they waited for me; if I could have patience I must hear some noise. I was a fool and acting as a fool, straining with my eyes until they were raw and pierced with pain, until I thought they must be sightless, until I nearly grew mad with fear they would be; and sightless I would pass their flares and Sorrel.

Be patient, be sane. The thing must lift; there must come light; that was the thing to wait for, light. I drew in my oars and sat with my arms about my knees, staring ahead, drifting with the sea, drifting with the fog. With a flicker my lantern went out suddenly; instantly the darkness seemed to press in the closer. I felt then there was no loneliness like this loneliness.

Wait for the light; what then? And if it broke to show me nothing, what was there left? Only the sea; surely beneath her gracelessness there must lie some quiet haven.

5

I cannot believe that I slept, yet it seemed the instant I looked again the fog had lifted; there was a pale light on the horizon and fading stars in the gray sky. At my very side, seeming very high and dripping with wetness, lay the brig. As I looked they were putting her flares out one by one, idling and watching; and there was Pascal hanging over the rail, twinkling and nodding, his cheeks as rosy as his coat.

As I stood up in the boat, he waved his hand and sang out: "A merry meeting, Peter my dear. 'Pon wig, a merry morning. Draw in and come aboard;

there is a ripe meal set ready, and I am starving. It is a monstrous odd thing if I set foot in this accursed country there is always fog. Have you remembered, Peter, we first met in fog?"

I said: "I have not forgotten. Your memory does you credit. See here, Pascal, I have come for my wife!"

He waved his plump hands and cocked his head knowingly. "God made none prettier, I'll put my oath to it. Ah! But a sly dog, Peter, a sly cunning dog; and yet to judge by your complexion I would have thought you with better manners."

I was right beneath the brig now. I made the rope fast to the side.

"I'm coming up," I said, staring at Pascal. "And I am taking her away."

He twinkled all the more. "So soon, so soon?" He put a whistle to his lips and blew sharply; to the men who came he cried, "Hands clear boat." I came up the gangway.

There were two or three of them standing there watching me. I expected then any kind of greeting, yet most certainly not the respectful pipe of the boat-swain and Pascal's salute. As I stood hesitating he called briskly: "All hands, bo'sun"; and even as the whistle died away and they came tumbling up, called loudly: "Salute, you hounds, salute. Do you not know your captain when ye see him? Your brave captain, your gallant captain; Peter the Cock, son of Jacob! Give him welcome, dogs; break your throats and sound him welcome. Salue, salue, salue!" And he

had his hat in his hand waving it lustily and their shouts must have been heard on the shore.

When they had shuffled away, grinning, muttering, I said again to Pascal: "What trick is this? What mind have you at work? Take me to my wife. Hark ye, Pascal, I will not be crossed there; bring me to her before you open wide your mouth again. Ah! by God, I know you've cornered me. Now I am yours, yours for the keeping. But first I put my wife ashore."

He looked at me curiously. He put his finger to the side of his mouth and stroked it reflectively; he murmured, "Ah," and "So so," and "Unmannerly, unmannerly." He spun on his heels and went toward the roundhouse. At the door we met the steward, it was like Pascal to bring him on the brig. My father had been content with the boy. He was a big negro, this fellow; I have never seen so gleeful a smile on any man's face as when he first saw me. It vanished instantly as he called with deference, "Breakfast am served, master"; and to me, "Honorable captain, servant, sah!"

I think I mentioned before the roundhouse was just sufficient accommodation for the two or three of us who might be with the brig during any special cruise. We took it in turn to sleep in the bunks at the sides, but there was one small cabin aft alongside the pantry. So far as I knew it was used for nothing except, occasionally, stacking extra stores. Yet it was toward this door Pascal looked and murmured: "Your lady? Will you not fetch her?" And as I stood staring, he murmured. "Perhaps the meal cools." He touched

the panels with one delicate finger, raising his voice only to murmur.

“Your husband, madam, and breakfast.” He stepped away from the door and stood waiting, hat in hand, head lowered. At that instant I had one terrible thought: Suppose she refused to see me? But I wronged her deeply in that, for she came out instantly. And instantly she looked at me; and I knew at once how it had changed with her. She regarded me steadily, questioningly, not with the scorn I had expected, but rather with indifference. The last time I had seen her was massed amid those shadows in the library. She had fled from me then; now we were brought face to face.

I said: “Sorrel, I am most deeply grieved for this. Your suffering, your indignity. I have a boat here and will row you to land. One of the men must be with us, perhaps more.” I looked at Pascal. He still leaned at the door, his eyes on the ground, strangely disinterested. I went on: “They will only be there to watch me, to see I keep my bond and return to them. Will you come with me, Sorrel? There is no need to prolong your distress.”

For the first time she looked at Pascal, and I saw her eyes narrow suspiciously. Then she passed him, coming slowly toward me until only the width of the table separated us.

She answered quietly, “I am quite ready.”

I opened the door for her to pass, first looking out myself, for I did not trust one man of any of these; but there was no one to be seen. I turned back to her,

waiting: It was just as she passed the table Pascal spoke. He advanced nearly to her side with inquisitive bird-like steps; he cried politely:

"Ah, pardon, I was all dreams." He pressed his hands together and bowed to Sorrel apologetically. "Madam, I fear, for a gentleman, your husband is strangely careless. He would put you on shore. Now, how considerate of him that is I cannot answer, but what consideration he may show to assist you reaching there without distress, my soul would be gratified to learn."

I stared at him intently. "By boat!"

He drew a thin gold-handled knife from his pocket and commenced paring his nails. He murmured idly, "Boat?"

Something in his voice made me stare the closer, then twist back to the deck and peer over the side. There was nothing to be seen; where I had fastened the boat, there was no boat; farther away, quite in the distance, I could just make it out, bobbing and black like a toy on the sea. I swung round to find Pascal at my side; I burst out:

"What trick is this, Pascal? Who loosed the boat?"

He held his hand so the sun shimmered on the fingertips. He seemed highly pleased with their look, and he muttered vaguely:

"Eh? The boat? Oh, la, la. Some rascal, the bos'n." He hummed contentedly.

I said steadily: "This won't do, Pascal. If not my boat, then yours; you will so order the men if you please."

He shook his head reproachfully. "They are at breakfast."

I said curtly, "Well, I can swim." And put my foot to the rail. He touched my arm and looked very knowing.

"That is not wisdom; that head of yours will be a pretty target for 'em on full stomachs."

I turned round facing him; it was very still on deck. The men were either breakfasting, as he said, or hiding; there was no one in sight except the helmsman, not even the steward. Through the door I could see the green of Sorrel's dress and a part of the table richly laid. I came close to Pascal, staring at him very hard.

"Is this a threat?" I asked.

He waved his hands in remonstrance. "Now you are unreasonable, unkind. 'Pon wig, are you not captain? Have not we languished in mourning for our master from the day we found the upturned boat in New York Harbor and your coat all mud? A threat? When we are just met and merry in our meeting? 'Pon wig! you go too far. This is not friendliness."

Said I, "Pascal, I wish to put my wife ashore; do you harken?"

He sighed. "Tactless, tactless."

I said, "It is a threat?"

He shook his head. "No, a habit; it is customary to keep what we take."

I cried, "You have me."

He muttered, "Ah, you!" and whistled softly.

I said softly: "Pascal, would you have me wring

your neck? you'll answer! If I squeeze words from your throat, I'll have my answer."

For one instant I caught the old show of cunning; then it passed. He shrugged his shoulders, put his whistle to his lips, and sounded one shrill note. They must have been waiting near at hand, for they were out and about like cats, glancing at the two of us with quick sharp eyes as if a game was aboard and they had bets to it. Said Pascal, with great solemnity: "It seems our captain is not satisfied. He has orders to give you. Stand to it now; be smart." He leaned away over the rail.

There were eight of them. Big hefty fellows, greasy-haired, dirty-skinned. Two were new to me; the rest I knew well. They were of our picked men. They stood now shambling yet amused; one of them—East by name; I remembered him well—kept glancing at the distant shore, then at the shrouds, and muttering beneath his breath. I noticed he carried pistols, the rest long sheath-knives. And I thought of Sorrel and took a step forward with the shout:

"Hoist the long-boat! Now, by God, be smart to it."

And not one of them moved; they just shuffled their feet and stood staring, their heads slightly lowered, their eyes insolent.

I looked at them each one, and took them in one by one, each man from his feet to his head. It seemed to make them the more uneasy, and they looked toward Pascal; but he had his back to them and was intent on the water.

I said: "What feeding have you had these years? I'll try you once again. Lower the long-boat!"

And a man laughed. I think he was sorry for it a moment later, for he backed his hand at his knife when he saw me coming. I was quicker, I had him by his throat and his belt. I could hear his breath tear and gurgle before I swung him round and down and out along the deck to the feet of the helmsman, where he lay quivering and then still. I was prepared for a rush then, but to my amazement not a man moved; they hardly looked at me but at Pascal, but I saw the fellow East had drawn both pistols. Pascal turned and faced me, hands on hips, smiling and nodding.

He said in his sweetest tones, "Peter, that was a pretty toss; we shall be one man short." He walked to where he was pitched and kicked him with his foot and turned again.

"That is so, one man short. Well, well," He rubbed his fingers on a handkerchief. "As I say, a pretty heave; and for its prettiness we will let it pass; but—a word in your ear, Peter—one man from eight is no matter, but eighty is of bigger account, and more than eighty a monstrous, nasty thing. This brig is dainty and of certain inconvenience if lost; but *The Five Wounds*—" He looked at me reflectively, pouting his lips. "*The Five Wounds*—the men were mighty tiresome the night she ran ashore upon the shoals, the day a Frenchman broke her with its fire." He shook his head sorrowfully. "You had better breakfast; or if you persist with the long-boat it will be lonely for your lady, for I, Peter, am not versed as

husbands are, and these men—they are heedless, though obedient to orders.”

I stammered, “Orders, what orders?”

“Ship’s orders,” he smiled gracefully. “As from their captain to his men.”

I saw him standing there debonair, twinkling, with cunning little lights in his eyes and a devilish swing to his body as he swung on his toes. He turned me sick and very cold. I groped for the door and turned back into the cabin. Sorrel was sitting now, her hands clasped on the table before her, her head bent. As I went in she glanced up—that strange aloof look; she said quietly—and I saw still the constraint was there:

“I am exceedingly hungry; will you please serve me.”

As I sat down at the table my fancy was such I could have seen a very wall shutting in and down between us.

There came immediately Pascal’s shrill cry, “Loose topsails,” and the hurry of feet along the deck. I could hear also his further call to the helmsman, “Keep her northwest by west.”

And the man’s answering drone, “northwest by west—”

CHAPTER VI

I

WE sat down to breakfast, and I judged it then eight o'clock in the morning. We moved slowly, for there was little wind and the sea very mild. I could see land a thin blue streak, yet thinning perceptibly as I watched; it would not be long before it altogether passed. The negro had appeared again and was busying about Sorrel with the dishes. His was the attitude of most perfect servility, and had he been trained on shore he could not have shown greater respectfulness to Sorrel. But I missed no chance to watch him carefully, particularly while he attended on her, and he might have stayed had I not suddenly recognized him as the negro who had chased the Spanish girl at the Plaza Santa Verde. It shocked me, that memory; I half rose to my feet and then, remembering it was my business to be cautious, said quietly enough, "You fellow, what do they call you?"

He looked startled. "Me? Israel, sah. Good name dat! You 'm forgotten?"

"I 'm remembering now. Out of here, Israel."

His whole face seemed to drop, the thick lips setting heavy and sullen. "Me steward, sah."

"I want no steward," I told him. "Out of here, Israel."

He said sulkily, "Dis am my orders, serving here."

I said: "You 'll take mine, Israel. Get away forward."

He hesitated, and I saw an ugly gleam in his eyes and watched them bend slowly to Sorrel. I got to my feet and faced him; I think at that moment all my old authority came tumbling back, and because of my fear I spoke to him as Peter the Cock.

"Get away forward! I 'll choose my servant, you harken? Out of here, black dog."

He put down with a clatter the dish he held. I was weaponless, but he was startled. He made quickly for the door, turned to stare again from there and I at him, then padded swiftly along the deck.

I guessed then that this possibly would be the only chance of being with Sorrel alone. I leaned to her, speaking very low:

"Try and have faith in me—and courage yourself. I think it 's all part of a trap. And a very black one; I can but try for some light."

I think she heard, though her face was bent, and she made no reply. The days were very long and the months many before we spoke alone again.

As I thought, Pascal came in immediately. He looked at me sharply, and I noticed him over red and hurried; but he said nothing. He took his place with his usual lightness.

"'Pon wig, madam, it is a rare sight to see a lady at our table. Had we known, we might have made pretty comforts suitable for the occasion; as it is, we are your servants."

To my amazement Sorrel replied. She said quietly, "I have known rougher customs; I did not know pirates fared so well."

I saw Pascal stare; he clattered down the tankard he had to his lips and leaned to her eagerly.

"Madam, that is a hard word. Pirates? Unman-nerly rascals, low dogs of a most nasty nature. Madam, you would have vexed our Peter's father to his very soul had you called him so."

She asked: "What are you? What were you at Santa Verde?"

He made a gesture of distress. "We had war with Spain."

She laughed. "War—"

He cried airily: "Faith, madam, we are free men. We go here, we seek there. Believe me, there is no difference between us and those who march in uniform excepting we make our own laws, either taking or leaving. We judge—"

She said "So you judged your right to take me?"

He shrugged his shoulders and reached for the ham. "'Fore God, why should we separate you and your husband? We are not hard."

She said slowly, "That was kind."

He seemed pleased. "We have our points."

"You talked of orders." She was still looking at him. "Being here, may I know them?"

He sliced a peach neatly and sharply. "With all my heart; Isola Sound." He poised the fruit on his fork, observed it as if well pleased, and ate with a slow pleasure.

She said dryly, "I do not know it."

Pascal shot a glance at me and then bent quickly to his plate. "So, so? Yet Peter was full of it last night."

I said sharply, "So you were listening, Pascal?"

"Listening?" He spoke carelessly. "I have ears as any man, and if you sound your tongue so roundly, even walls will hear."

I said, "How long were you there?"

"How long?" He stared down the table, shifting his eyes to Sorrel, his fingers pulling his round full lips. "How long?" he said slowly. "Long enough."

Something in his manner stirred my temper to a loathing and a sudden whirl of maddened fury. I leaned to him. "Be careful, Pascal, be careful!"

He might have answered—I think he would have willingly—but Sorrel cried out, "Since I am to go to this Isola Sound, I would like to hear something of it."

The suspense broke suddenly. I had no idea how close the thing had been until I found myself suddenly spearing the table with a knife, using such force that the blade snapped and shot across the room. I turned to stare after it stupidly, and I heard Pascal giggle:

"Plaguy bad steel."

"It was meant for moderate use," Sorrel said slowly. "Moderation is the best kind of habit."

She was not looking at me, but I stared at her sharply, yet her face told nothing; it was closed against me now, like a shuttered window. And yet I took

her words for me. I saw Pascal twinkle, cock his head and whistle a line, smile and cry sweetly:

"Madam, I love your wit. Peter, we must hold fast to such wisdom." He spoke as if greatly amused. He went on, "'Pon wig, Peter, you should have learned such temperance during your sojourn."

I asked him, "Was it through Jamie that you followed my tracks?"

He shook his head. "A bad confidant, Peter; a clumsy sopping fellow of infinite stupidity. I would have thought you better schooled by Jacob." He sighed, surveying me gloomily.

I said slowly, "How you must have pestered him!"

"Pestered?" His voice rang shrill and vexed, "Pestered? He started to chatter in his sleep, he plagued our every nights, and as for daytime—why, faith, the man would moan like a widow. Pestered! Each of us indeed, and not a way to muzzle him!"

"Except when you listened!" I had a vision of the eager stammering Jamie whispering to me in the night, "Did you ever go the round wassailing? . . ." And hard on top of it the sharp remembrance of his huddled silent body pitched on the cliff. I cried bitterly: "And he gabbled too free; was that it? You stopped his tongue so other ears might not hear. Quick work, Pascal; the old touch."

He nodded pleasantly. "None like it. It does not do to waste time."

I asked: "How did you manage? Yet he was easy, I suppose."

"He missed you. A moody maudlin spirit. 'Pon wig, he had the insolence to think we 'd put an end to you!" He glared indignantly. "Pish! What an empty-headed duckling! And we might have drunk fun to your merry soul each night of the year, thinking your body dragged the sand had not he muttered and we—" He took snuff with great deliberation. "We loved you so well we urged him continue."

I whispered, looking at Sorrel, "He knew so little!"

Pascal nodded vigorously: "True, true, plaguy little. It needed our wits, our boldness, to start a search for one we counted dead."

I was about to question him further when Sorrel spoke. "Who was this man, this Jamie?"

"A native of your parts, madam: a bewitched mad fellow given to fancies and deep drinking. A rich fighter. 'Pon wig, a fine loose sword and a cunning gunner; but free with his tongue, soft like a puppy, whining here and whining there." He drummed with his fingers on the table. "A shocking man for a comrade; a naughty babbler. 'T is finished now; a loss. A wretched business."

She looked puzzled. "Of Plover's Cove, do you mean?"

I said heavily, "Pixton—Jamie Pixton; he ran away when you were small."

I wondered dully if she remembered, as I, our walk across the moor and that great wind which smote its waste from end to end and danced and tossed the leaves until they caught and twisted in her hair. She had mentioned Jamie then with little interest, with little

thought. His memory of her had been vague and precious; out of so sweet a thing had come this tragic pursuit.

She appeared, visibly distressed. "Jamie? Our Jamie Pixton with you?"

Pascal nodded brightly, "And might have shaped into as fine a dog as Peter's father or Peter himself; but he overdid it with wine, madam, and his heart was not fixed deep enough. It led him astray like his tongue. A mighty silly trick."

"So you killed him?" Her face was very white; she appeared greatly shocked. "I was surely too small for him to have remembered me; he—" She stopped and put her hand to her eyes as if she saw something and made the vain effort to shut it away. "It must have been little enough."

"So, so." Pascal spoke carelessly. "But our Peter here seemed to have freshened him." He paused and smoothed his cheeks with soft plump palms. "Imagination and gentle pressure are excellent things to speed the mind."

She said quickly, "Was he at Santa Verde?"

He was, and each of us! But God was in a plaguy merry mood that day, and Peter had the luck and hugged it tight in his own cunning fashion. Eh, Peter, what a trick? But what a fool to turn to Jamie!"

He spoke in his old mocking manner, half earnest, half jest, as he had rebuked me in my early days for some impetuosity. I remembered in a fight at Jamestown I had thought the man slipped and lowered my sword rather than run him through and the fellow

had sprung in and caught me with uncommon sharpness. So then had Pascal scoffed; so now I caught the old impatient sneer. But if he spoke so to catch Sorrel's attention, he failed. She did not seem to listen; for the first time she looked across at me, and for a moment I might have thought she showed some of the old frank comradeship. That was foolishness; it was but a glance, then she had turned to Pascal again.

"I would rest now." She was on her feet and at the door before either Pascal or I had risen. "I am very tired; if I could sleep I might be better company." She was in the cabin with the door closed.

For a moment Pascal and I sat silently. Then he roused himself and stretched for a pipe, stuffing it briskly, whistling all the while. He said politely:

"A most distinguished gracious lady; it would have been melancholy indeed for you had you separated." He shook his head with profound disapproval. "Aye, faith, we have our points; we have a delicacy in such matters that suits us well." He smoked very hard, yet all the time I noticed he kept his eyes fixed on her door. I stared at him intently, and I know I felt then, observing his cool insolence, his indifference, that if ever I needed steady brain and much thought I needed it now. This was not a matter of dog fighting dog. It was a business of cunning, his and mine. A shipful of men and my wits. And I asked, watching him, marking how far he might go:

"I wonder what it was, Pascal, which set you to run the risk of sailing to England? Not just the shoals; I cannot think it was the shoals."

He put his pipe on the table and folded his hands on his knees; he never moved his eyes from Sorrel's door. He murmured:

"Not just the shoals." He turned and looked at me and smiled. "Not entirely the shoals—perhaps curiosity."

Then I knew.

2

Curious how odd memories come back even in the midst of some great crisis. In the roundhouse then watching Pascal crack nuts, sometimes smoking, sometimes drinking, speaking not a word, I thought of a certain episode on the Bristol coach when a pale, earnest man leaned toward me to ask in troubled tones, "Sir, do you believe in God?"

And as I stared a dirty fellow at my side with a crumpled muffler round his throat and a pistol-point stuck from his pocket laughed very loud and shouted:

"Tush! What use is God?"

I never answered the questioner, and he seemed to shrink back on his seat more dejected than ever and entirely silenced; neither did either of us three speak further. But I might have been again on that rocking coach hearing that hoarse mocking voice, "What use is God? . . ." It seemed now more than ever as if that cry was wrung from my heart itself. I stood entirely alone; neither God nor man with me. And just how grotesque that truth was I learned within the next few days.

I took my old position with them; I was their cap-

tain; I gave my orders; I marked their usual obedience. I had my place at the head of our table. I served no watch, but I had the reports; I was Peter the Cock. I was nothing at all. There was no order but northwest by west. We were straight for Isola Sound. Ships might pass, might hail; I gave our answer. They never questioned how I would reply; no appeal on my part would be worth the while. They had me very close; they mocked me in their hearts. I might walk the poop with pistols in my belt, but each of them was over-armed, and each of them had cat's eyes; and if I overstepped the mark there would be nothing between Sorrel and Pascal—between each one of them and her—except my dead body. I must have been a marvelous sight to them, and as I walked I fancied with each turn I heard the ringing of my cap and bells.

If I could have spoken once alone with Sorrel; asked her in God's name to loose the mask she always faced me with and tell me her whole mind and begged for her faith again— I used to pray for this. And, having prayed, think on my prayer with terror; when I had spoken to her last I had no better tale to tell than that of Santa Verde, I had no sweeter truth but that I had killed her father. What sort of mind could she open to me? What sort of face to show if I could kneel and beseech her trust? I had done the same thing at Santa Verde, with what result? I was Peter the Cock then, and time had not changed my name for her.

Foolish to pray so; senseless to waste time so. Those days of solitude with Sorrel had long passed; they

were of Plover's Cove. This was the brig at sea. Never alone with her, never alone myself. Always some man or other; hovering, watching, listening. While at meals, if there was not Israel the negro waiting, he would be shuffling in the pantry; if Pascal was not at table there would be Death.

Somehow I had not expected Death, had not thought of him seriously. It was our second night at dinner: he came into the roundhouse, slipped in a seat, and began to eat before I was aware of him. I know I was eating soup, and I let the spoon slip from my fingers and the stuff cool in the bowl while I leaned back and stared at him. Pascal was there, and Sorrel of course. I saw her give one sharp stare at him as he faced her over the table, then bend again to her plate. Pascal was talking in his usual airy fashion. Neither he nor Israel, who was changing plates, appeared to notice him. With Israel it was of no account, but from Pascal it seemed odd. In the old days Death had never actually sat at meals with us; he ate here and there, having as much attention from the steward as any one; his actual position had always caused some curiosity. But Pascal with his general show of fastidiousness had been known to leave the table and let his stomach go empty rather than feed with Death at his side. Now here he was in the best of humors with Laughing Death at his elbow, eating meat with his fingers, drinking in huge gulps so that the wine trickled to the cloth, utterly indifferent to his surroundings, yet suddenly the dominating figure in the room.

I heard Israel muttering at my elbow. I let him take

away my unfinished soup and pushed aside the dish he placed before me. I had not thought of Death. I had not thought of Pascal and Pascal's men with Death close to their side as he had been with my father; I had insolence enough to think to match my wits against the lot of them, if not while on the brig, once we were at Isola Sound. I had made plans, I was forever making plans. I knew now I had best start again and fashion my cunning, not as upon the brig nor on Isola Sound, rather as if moving upon a chess-board. Later as the days passed I found myself curiously puzzled concerning his position with Pascal. As before, he had nothing to do with the ship or its business; he was still as with my father a separate aloof being; yet it gradually dawned on me in some mysterious manner he had a greater power with Pascal than he ever did with my father. But Pascal was afraid of no man; Pascal was wont to look upon Death as a fellow of great skill and purpose in all affairs, a man of the highest value but moving in his own place. And now they ate together, and he slept in one of the three bunks in the round-house. He might stay on the poop all day and leave his litter of ivory and chessmen all about the place, and Pascal had nothing to say. The same impatient twittering little man, pompous, villainous, evil-souled; yet not the same. Death might walk his side of the poop and cut him out as in all his finery he plumed in the sun; Death overshadowed him, and he said not a word; yet how greatly that shadow bound him neither of us knew or suspected until much later.

Two weeks out, three weeks out, four weeks. The same getting up, the same turning in, the same grotesque meals, the same brooding quiet. Sorrel, Pascal, Death, and I; and with each hour my jester's suit fitted me the better. Once, in a wild wind with a creamy sea, a man-of-war came crashing down on our port side so close that I could see the red of her decks and the glint of her cannon, the officer of the watch muffled in his thick coat leaning to stare as she caught us up, her great masts raking the skies.

I heard Pascal at my elbow: "She means to hail."

I looked to where Sorrel sat on the skylight. I caught the look in her eyes as she stared at the great ship. I knew what it meant to her and what she desired. For one minute we raced together neck and neck, and she towered above us enormous and splendid; then as Pascal had suspected, her officer yelled through his trumpet:

"What ship is that?"

And I saw Pascal then very close to my shoulder, and all along the forecastle our men were gathered, not watching the ship but me, and very near to Sorrel Death was playing chess. Close—so easy to hail, and then? As she passed I would have been a dead man, for unless they split the very masts out of her she would be gone a mile ahead, and the brig would have dodged and luffed and set away alone with Sorrel. Too easy to hail. Like a mad beast I shook Pascal off, and shouted in return the old ready lie:

"The *Magpie* out of Bristol for Jamestown."

And the man-of-war was passing, had passed in a

scurry of spray and a heap of foam. I think they had seen Sorrel, for they were staring curiously, I think also that was the reason the officer had his hat off with some show of politeness; I could just faintly hear the end of his cry:

“ Good voyage; good-by!”

And she was gone like a huge flying bird, and we were again solitary, Sorrel and I on that vast black sea. I wondered then if Pascal saw me turn to look at her, and for the first time meet her eyes on mine. I hoped not. It seemed to me then she looked at me as before that multitude sanhedrim Christ turned to look at one Peter who had betrayed Him. It was because I remembered the reason of that look I fled down the ladder to the roundhouse.

3

The fifth week out. We were drawing in very near to Isola Sound, very near now to what surely must be the end. What kind of end? They wanted me, I supposed, for the shoals, and then? I should be useful to them for a time, a length of time in which Pascal or some one could learn the channel. Easy for them with their sharp wits, as easy as it would be impossible for me to refuse the teaching. But after that? Crazy to sit and think, when there was not one thought that could bring hope. Nothing to be done, nothing to look forward to; only to wait, be cautious and wait. Wait for the night to shut away the mockery of light and all those faces which moved and watched and grinned in the light. Wait

for that night to lift with straining ears and staring eyes, remembering the very darkness held unknown dread; remembering, I alone stood guardian in the shadows.

And all this while there seemed to settle about the ship a greater quiet, a more deadly suspense. It appeared as if each man was not watching me but Sorrel, and not Sorrel alone but one another. They were restless, sullen. They seemed to be waiting as I waited, but for something very different. They would cluster together, staring toward the poop yet speaking hardly at all; they obeyed orders in a grim sort of fashion; they were stealthy men, possessed of a curious restraint. I used to wonder what might happen if that restraint broke. And yet it was not with them I was concerned. It was my bitterness to know that Pascal and Death held them in check. Pascal and Death stood guardians to Sorrel, not I. They only added by their presence, by their furtive manner, to the horror of that voyage. They were but a part of it, yet insignificant. Pascal and Death; I was beginning to understand their moods. I had become accustomed to those meals in the roundhouse. To the babble of Pascal, his gallantry, his graceless twitter. To the patience of Sorrel, her brave wit, her fearless talk. I used to marvel at her self-possession, her steady quiet. I wondered if she knew how well she played with Pascal. Had she lost her control and answered to him either too much or not at all, I might not have my chance for Isola Sound; and did they know it, I staked my all in getting there. Yet even Pascal's chatter could

not entirely hide the deadly atmosphere. There would come pauses when he would sit back hunched in his seat, moody and savage, when I would try and engage him in talk; but my throat seemed choked with dust and my voice harsh and cracked, when Sorrel would leave the room quickly and go to her cabin, and we two were left staring at Death noisily mouthing his food or watching Israel padding the room furtive and silent, until like a shadow he would slip away forward and there make his report to the waiting men.

And as the weeks passed those silences increased until there spread about the place so great a tension you might cut it with a sword. So horrible a dread I began to think we could not last the voyage, not one of us, unless there came some shock to break the atmosphere. And the thing did happen, yet only to increase the horror, but for the time it startled Pascal and set him thinking madly about something other than Sorrel.

There came now the first land wind, hardly above a most gentle breath, carrying with it faint scent of flowers, of hot, dark earth, of fruit and trees. Strange birds came crying, and when the night closed down the stars shone out like gleaming suns, and all the sea showed pools of golden light. I hungered for the sound, for land beneath my feet, for space and all the hopes that only earth could bring for freedom from his devilish ship weighed with all manner of secrets, where Sorrel and I must always meet yet never alone. Never talk except in polite disinterested tones as one acquaintance to another, continually listened to by

Pascal or Death. Each closed away from each this strange terrible wall between. To get away from these things. There was so much to be done. So much more now that Death had disconcerted Pascal, and for the moment he held him in check, yet caused me only a greater dismay.

After dinner it happened. Sorrel was in her cabin. It was Pascal's watch. I lay in my bunk, my face to the wall. Death had just come in, but I took no notice of him. How long I lay I do not know, but something moved me to start up and stare at him, and I remember even then thinking how grotesque it was I should be held prisoner in the very ship on which my father had kidnapped me. I should swing my feet from the very bunk I had lain in and heard my father shout his mad talk of God. I was a grown man now, and his servant Death sat in his very place and mocked me as I lay. He was looking at me as I turned. He was naked to his waist, and the sweat on his skin glistened in the lamplight.

It struck me then the flare of his scar was very noticeable, as it showed when he was pleased. His long thin lips, his pale eyes mocked me; I had seen that look when he had beaten me at chess. And I saw now he had chalked his board in usual fashion on the wood and set there in full marching order his carved pieces. Very beautiful they looked, lovely in color, delicate in craftsmanship. I thought he meant me to play; then I saw he had shifted his eyes from me to the figures. A sudden suspicion made me lean on the table and stare at them intently.

They were finished. Each face carved, each piece designed. I went over them one by one, and one by one they seemed to jeer back at me. It was extraordinarily simple. He had carved my father as green king and put as queen the figurehead from *The Five Wounds*. He had made that ship a castle; he had made its fellow the pillared hall of the old palazzo; with his usual devilish humor he had carved his own face as a pawn and cut it higher than any other. But they were of little account, those green pieces. It was the red which made me stare and catch my breath. The brig and the old council-room at each corner, Pascal as a knight, fat, ornate, marvelously modeled, myself as king—I had expected that. Sorrel as queen. I think even as I had begun to stare I had expected that also. I looked from the board to her door and back to the board and the figures. I stared at Death, and I knew the voyage was as nothing. Pascal, the men, the brig, were of no account. We had only just begun the game, and it lay entirely between Death and me.

Later, when Pascal came down from his watch, he also saw them. He gaped closely with open mouth and glaring eyes. He fell back against the table with a grunt like a pig; he leaned there for the moment staring at Death; then with a shriek of fury—I think also of fear—swung his hat over the table so that each piece was swept to the ground. Having done this, he remained in stupefied silence, his fingers tearing at his neck-cloth as if he would choke. But Death made no sound. He got to his feet and began in his quick manner to pick up each figure, stare at it, and replace it on

its square, and Pascal let him to the very last, when very slowly he went on deck. Later, much later, I went back to my bunk and Death stretched out in his and seemed to sleep immediately. But I lay awake until the lamp burned itself out and sobbled in the oil, and quietly there came the dawn. But the chess figures still remained silent and mocking; symbolical not only of the cunning of Death but of the grotesque humor of his cruelty.

CHAPTER VII

I

WE sailed into Isola Sound one sultry afternoon with a sullen sun jammed like a red-hot coin into a thick muddy sky; a sea like glass and as still. A heavy somber day such as befitted the occasion. I had the wheel. So in the past I had steered across the shoals, bringing to those who waited some piled-up cargo. Now in a different fashion I brought them fruits enough. Their leader for judgment, a woman for their pleasure.

Isola Sound. It had not changed. There stood the crucifix as of old, salt-sprayed, wind-blown, mocked for its very meekness yet beautiful and unafraid. There ran the broken pavement, the ancient painted palazzo, with its black pillars and overhanging green and yellow balcony; the tall bright palms, the crying birds.

I could hear Pascal chattering to Sorrel. Showing his old careless manner, seemingly forgetful of that night when Death had shown his hand, and of those following days. Those frightful silent days with Pascal suddenly dreadfully quiet, when Sorrel sat unnoticed and I forgotten; when he seemed only intent on Death, and Death in turn regarded him with amused indifference; when all his usual show of coolness

seemed clean knocked away. He slunk about, a staggered, watching man, dismayed and even timid. Now that had passed. So with the men; their sullen quiet went with the first glimpse of the town, and as we neared our anchorage they pressed forward, singing and laughing, picking out some man or woman and whooping their greeting over the water. It was just as we turned into the bay the first glimmer of real hope was mine.

The rock, the great shoulder which thrust out into the sea and nearly a quarter of the distance across the shoals, I had forgotten but I now remembered. It had been within the first few months that I had joined my father when he told me there ran a hollowed passage to its end. He had shown me the passage secretly one night, and I had wondered then if he had ever expected to use it himself, for at the far end well back into the mouth, high up and snug, only like to be disturbed in a heavy sea, there was secured a boat; I was very certain then that there was some deep cunning in this, for the rock here made a rough incline to the sea down which there should be little difficulty in the launching. If I could get Sorrel to that passage! Somehow I must get her to that boat.

It was Pascal who interrupted my thoughts. Pascal who touched me on the shoulder and with all his usual lightness, cried:

“The second home-coming, eh, Peter? You came in greater state then! A barge of a boat.” He kicked the deck vigorously. “A mean vile ship not fit for our estate; but *The Five Wounds!*” He glowed with

sudden recollection. "*The Five Wounds!* a royal ship, by God, Peter, a monstrous fine ship. She rots now; a fitting place for birds and their dung; once walked by men—" He seemed suddenly very dejected. "Soon to drift with the tide."

I had tried, ever since we saw land and sailed the shoals, to keep my eyes well ahead rather than turn to look to that side where each of our men turned and stared and looked at me, then back again, and seemed suddenly sunk in a most profound gloom. Pascal at my elbow made me look. Unwillingly I saw her, through a mist as if through tears; my first love, my old desire, *The Five Wounds*. She lay on her great side; she lay very peacefully, and her mighty limbs seemed to rest with great meekness down into the water. Not by the sea had she come there. Not sea nor wind nor rain would thrash that mighty heart to silence and pitch her down so roughly. I knew that. My hands upon her, she would be now riding in the bay; my eyes watching out her path, her glory would not have been so mocked in the sight of men. Green and blue water now forever bursting and bubbling over her from end to end, and weeds between her planks, choking and stifling her. Her tattered sails, her lean masts toppled to the sea to lie there until, torn apart, they would go out and down with other tides. And yet she rebuked me not. I who had vaunted my love; caressed her, adored her; worshiped her beauty, boasted her grace; yet had slipped away as a thief may run in the night and left her heedless, only to see her now huddled down in seas she had

once so grandly charged, beslimed and filthy, broken and silenced. Yet grandly compassionate for those who go about romancing.

We had crept into the bay now. I passed the wheel to the man whose trick it was and went to the rails. For the moment Pascal and I were to ourselves, the sails already furled, the cable running with a rattle.

Said Pascal slowly, "A cruel end, a devilish cruel end!"

I said: "Not so cruel; she goes to the sea. Even now they are not separated."

He remained silent, his hands fidgeting on the rail before him, his face ponderous and overclouded. He cried bitterly: "She never saw the bay again after you left us. You led her out; she cruised and waited for your return; when we went into New York with the brig she never went back. We kept her with half a shipful outside the shoals; twice she was set upon and twice broke their backs. 'Pon wig, she had a gallant heart. A Frenchman caught her in the end, a dodging, chasing, tricking knave! Rammed her in the mud and blew her sides away. I love you little for that, Peter; by God, I do."

His face had lost its mockery and had become suddenly resentful and gloomy, his eyes small and dark with anger. I could not answer him for staring. Here was a new, unknown Pascal, the sailor mourning a dead ship.

I could understand that grief, but I was jealous he should show such love. I said:

"There are better things than ships; man lives but

once, a short time for him to find how much is worth the living."

He laughed shrilly. "A dreamer! A dreamer and the son of a dreamer! But there was meat to his dreams, by God there was!"

He stood staring toward the wreck. I think at that moment he hated me most bitterly. *The Five Wounds* had suited his temperament, his roving, swaggering life. He had become accustomed to the ship and, like a man who, with no definite reason, will yet seek each night his same corner at his same tavern, so had he turned eager to the frigate, to traffic here and there in his delight. Now I had been the cause of his homelessness. He saw himself suddenly desolate, tricked from the only thing the best in him had truly loved.

This sudden kinship made me say with a repressed earnestness: "If you and I could be friends, Pascal, comrades again as we have been the years back!"

I caught an odd flicker in his eye; he turned deliberately to stare at me closely. He said slowly: "Like Santa Verde. What comradeship was that when we stored no treasure but shared each with each! You go too fast; even captains must be checked."

I asked steadily, "Is that your last word, Pascal?"

He nodded sourly. "By God, it is."

I said, watching him: "Whatever it has come to between you and me, we're not alone. 'T is three of us, Pascal. We would be better side by side against that third than all split up, like a house divided."

He took a pace forward and came very close to me.

"I walk alone," he whispered. "Hark you, drink

that in; I walk alone, and I take alone. Stand at your side! By God, I face you."

And I answered him steadily: "You are over-clumsy, Pascal, like a puppy, like a braggart. Walk as you please, but men have tripped as they walked. There is only one thing worth remembering: until I teach the way through the shoals I have some value, but you, Pascal, have none. If I killed you now, Death might even thank me, but if you killed me they would hang you higher than the masthead. I tell you, Pascal, you are full of mistakes. There is Death and you and I; which of us may be the last to go is worth the waiting for, but the first— 'Fore God, Pascal, I shall not be the first."

He seemed to shrink very small. To become suddenly very old, as if some spark of life had gone right out of him. For my part, I did not care in what temper he regarded me; I only felt then the strain unendurable; it seemed as if we had been on the brig for years with its ghastly atmosphere of apprehension. We were in the bay now; we were at the very place that gave me hope for Sorrel; there was the rock with its hollowed passage, its hidden boat; in how short a time might one of them learn of the channel? Or rather how long dared I make my lessons?

2

They were waiting for us, impatient and crowding. They had not lessened in numbers since I had been with them, despite those many lost with the frigate. Others had joined who knew me only by name and

stared with a greater curiosity than the rest; younger men these, less hardened by the life but very vile-looking. There were the women there, too; they had not changed. Even as the men—but with the difference of their kind—they stood about pricked and waiting for the woman who they knew we had aboard; this was the game they loved. Not one of them could have hoped for a greater amusement on our return. Jamie was dead, but I had returned; there had been rumors of a difference between Pascal and Death. They did not threaten as we passed; they crowded close enough to be jostled back good-humoredly by the men from the brig who acted as a body-guard. Some made mock salutations; one waved a length of rope; some one was singing:

“A-roving, a-roving
Since roving’s been my ruin . . .”

But after all it was not so much myself they had come out to see but Sorrel.

The green riding-dress was stained with sea-water, faded by the sun, its silver buttons tarnished; the lace lay dank and loose at her throat and wrists. She wore a colored handkerchief about her head, with only a little of her hair falling beneath it. She went upright, bold, and free; there was not one who stared at her she did not mark him well; he was the first to turn away. So in ancient days most prisoned queens have walked to hear the judgment of their captors.

We went through the great pillared hall, up the broken stairs to the big council-room. There were

just the three of us, no sign of Death; but his absence did not check Pascal's obvious discomposure.

He went to the balcony and stared out at the seething, shouting mob beneath. He came back to the table and sat there drumming with his fingers. I asked:

"Well, Pascal?"

He did not alter his position; but his eyes strayed to the door; he appeared as if listening intently. I said again:

"What of it now, Pascal?"

He said sullenly, "Time enough yet." He burst out violently, "How you pester a man!" There were some grapes on the table, and he caught up a bunch and began tearing them off one by one, snapping each sharply between his teeth. He cried shrilly: "You must learn patience. 'Fore God, if you did not learn it in your captaincy, better stomach it now; there is no prettiness in those who over-hurry."

He spoke in great haste, forever looking at the doorway and munching the fruit as if he starved. And Sorrel spoke to him. She had remained standing ever since we came in, watching him all the time. She said:

"Who is captain?" He went on stuffing his mouth but staring more cunningly at her. She asked softly, "Is it the man you call Death?"

He sprang to his feet in great confusion; he stammered furiously: "'Pon wig, madam, you jest too far. A mute, a tongueless bastard to overrule me? You think too sharply, mistress, too free—"

She never let her eyes leave his face; she smiled

the slightest. "I think you are afraid of him, monsieur."

He gaped at her across the table, for the once neither nimble nor deft with his tongue. She went on:

"Are we your guests?" She repeated firmly: "Am I your guest? Do you call this friendly treatment? What business is between us?"

He looked at the doorway again, then to the windows. He muttered, "Much." He pushed the now stripped stalks away. He repeated, "Much."

I came a little forward from the window. "More than you think, Pascal. For so little a man you take on a very great deal."

He swung round and stared at me with a sharp intake of breath. "Ah!" he whispered; and scraped his chair about to see me the better. "Ah!" he whispered.

And then, so quietly that he seemed like a shadow, Death came in. He took up his stand at the further window from me, and stood there with bent head intent on whittling a piece of wood.

Pascal seemed all sunken on his chair, a mere heap of gaudy garments stuffed with a vapid body. He riveted his eyes on Death, and Death took not the slightest heed of him; only of us four did Sorrel watch Pascal. She said with sudden impatience:

"Sirs, you must tell me something. This—this is impossible treatment."

Without any effort, but in his usual easy fashion, Death bent suddenly and chalked on the floor, "Tell her." Then straightened himself in the same swiftness and continued at the wood.

Pascal stared at the writing blankly. He appeared as if he was hesitating. I saw him once look sharply at Death, then down again; he said rapidly:

"What would you, madam? You have a husband. If you will be so hasty in your marrying, you must needs run with him." And then as quickly as he had begun, so he stopped. In one long stride Death had crossed to him, touched him lightly on the arm with his knife, and pointed with it to his rough chalking on the floor, and smiled down on Pascal, one of his thin mocking smiles, known well enough to the men when he wished to emphasize some point or situation of his own making.

I saw Pascal run his red tongue about his lips and keep it there between his teeth and loosen it to swallow hurriedly and cry:

"There is too much talk. 'Fore God, there is!" He stared wildly at Death and then at Sorrel and began to stammer jerkily, "We have something to learn from—" he seemed to stumble on the word—"your husband. Matters as between men. He tricked us. He has to answer for that trick."

Sorrel said, "And then?"

He stared at her moodily. He commenced to cut patterns on the table with his dagger. He said sullenly: "Time enough for that. Do we not wallow in patience?"

At that Death shot out a naked foot and smeared the chalk away, only to scrawl afresh:

"Finish, finish!"

It seemed to inflame Pascal. He clattered the dagger to the table. He screamed:

"Driven, driven! Am I a pig to be driven? Not even old Jacob plagued me so. 'Poñ wig, he knew me, he did me fair; he knew my sword; it has a pretty taste to skewer meat. By God, he knew that well! It has piled up a merry feast, as merry a name as mine, Pascal Aurilly Nicolas Sainte-Jeanne de Tavenne! That for your gullets. Who 'll better it?"

His voice echoed and reëchoed in the dim rafters, but there was not a movement from any one of us. At that instant I felt an enormous pity for him. He seemed suddenly so utterly ridiculous. A peevish, fault-finding, foolish little man, making one forlorn attempt to prove a dignity which was never his, which was of no consequence at all and never had been; the issue now on hand was too terrific for any thought of his trumpeting. He saw it. He looked round on each one of us now with bloodshot eyes and panting breath. What impression he hoped for from his ravings God only knew; we might have been wooden figures for the answer we gave. I think, for the first time, he saw his own tragedy. He took it bravely enough. It was the old Pascal of the swagger talk who struck the small gong at his side and with his pleasantest smile offered me snuff. He merely shrugged at my refusal; he might have said something, but a young Indian girl came in and stood helpless and frightened at the entrance. He said briskly:

"Madam, we hope forgiveness for our shortcomings; here is a likely enough wench to attend you. She

will do your bidding. If she turns saucy and vexes you—she 'll do so but once. We have a sharp way for those who turn restive.”

He spoke brutally, as if after what had passed he enjoyed this authority. The girl seemed to shrink into nothing as he talked. I doubt she understood much English, but I think she knew enough—and understood from his tone to guess his meaning. Sorrel glanced at her quickly but kindly; then turned to Pascal.

“One word: I go to my own room now; is that so?”

“If it please you, madam.” He spoke politely.

She nodded. “It does please me. And something more: that room is mine. Do I make myself understood? There shall be no trifling with my privacy. I shall eat there, sleep there, rest there; leave as I may please and return as I please always with my maid. When my door is closed it shall be respected; when I walk abroad I shall be respected; and above all it suits me to keep my own company. Later on there can be further talk; for the moment I see no necessity. You made no terms with me when you took me from my garden; you showed a haste then which was unmannerly. Women have privileges; I would remind you of that; I would remind you of mine.”

She was looking at him very steadily, but he kept his eyes fixed on the table. With a sudden gesture of impatience she turned to Laughing Death and stared him squarely in the face. It made me catch my breath to see with how little fear she looked. It

was the first time she had ever shown him any marked notice, and the first time she had made appeal during this captivity; circumstances had it so that she made it now to Death. He was still bending over his wood, yet as she turned he was in an instant standing straight with a curious show of respect, hitherto completely unknown to him. He bent humbly but with certain dignity almost to the ground, moved aside the leather curtain which hung across the doorway, and, with head and body still bent, bowed her out, the native girl running on in front. In that quick gesture he had shown her a greater assurance than had been offered her all this while. More than that, she had turned to him as one in supreme authority, and he had instantly and finally answered her as that.

3

For the rest of that day and long into the night I sat alone and for the first time could think with a greater steadiness than hitherto had been mine. I had no fear for Sorrel. This was not the brig with its crush for room; this was the old town, brimful of rabble and noise, its very pitch of continual excitement giving some sort of security. It was all a matter of chance; I knew that. Chance that my stealth should prove greater than Death's; chance that my cunning should outwit his; chance that the risk I ran might not be the means of my fall and Sorrel's. One relief I had already: there was no time to waste in fuss with Pascal. He seemed to have faded away, in one instant to have been swallowed up by his own extravagance. There

would be no further need to wonder how far he might dare with his devilish trickery, his sly manners. I had Death with me until my necessity passed. We faced each other across the table as players at their game of chess. I knew how he considered us, how deep the danger lay; we were but pieces set out upon one common board for his amusement. Pascal already was on one side. I could follow when my value was gone; his final play would be with Sorrel. And yet I would rather run my risk with him than any other! It was all a question of skill, and I dared match mine against his and hope on it; it was the dangerous restlessness of those like Pascal which alarmed me most. I knew now with safety I could leave him to Death.

With the next morning there started for me days of unutterable length and weariness, times when all my hope died down to such depression and despair, I seemed to be a dead man making belief with life again. Out with the boat. The harsh noise of its bottom grating against the sand, the sudden jolt as, caught by the water, it slipped into the sea and settled down to its ride with all the ease of a gull drifting with open wings in the hot air. Out with the boat. Each day with Pascal, all questions and suspicions. With Pascal like a bird, all plumes and conceit; he had departed to his old peacock ways again, and with a bird's bright eyes, mocking and watchful. With sudden bursts of gaiety and sudden quiet, yet all the while over-anxious to learn, impatient, gasping in the sun, but with such deadly earnestness even in the full heat of the day he would be out for the teaching.

Out with the boat. On water like burning glass so hot and flat we seemed to push our way through an immense veil of thick steaming haze which, like a fog, could choke and stifle and, unlike a fog, would burn and scorch as if we moved through molten fire.

Days—with both Death and Pascal, sometimes only Death. Watching him, observing his quick intelligence. Fascinated by his face as I had been forever fascinated; attracted by his insolent air as I had always been attracted, admiring as I had ever admired his most acute mind. He had been my father's shadow, his servant and his slave. I used to think with bitterness he had learned much from him; I had learned nothing or very little. In some uncanny fashion he seemed to have taken possession of my father's highest powers of judgment and cunning, while it was the irony of fate that I had only learned this passage through the shoals. Strange it was that where my father once must, in a silent way, have nosed about the reefs and found this crossing, have planned his secret kingdom and later brought his ship to start about his crazy sailing, I, his son, should now pass on to his tongueless servant the very thing which made my father so completely powerful. And still I did not think, with all his craft, Death had ever wished to learn the channel and rise to that authority. He had been content with my father; he had been content during my short captaincy and Pascal's. But there was no woman then.

All men have some uncertain twist in them, age-old and sometimes very late in showing. Like a monstrous shadow it now enveloped Death and threatened Sorrel.

I kept very quiet. It seemed the only way, to hold my tongue and temper right to the very last; it would be madness to strike until then. I knew so far she was safe. When we went out each morning I used to see her very beautiful upon the balcony of her room; when we came back I used to see her across the bay dim and distant, but still showing herself that I might know she was safe; at least I used to think that was her reason.

I had seen her so, yet differently. I had seen her, closed in by Somerset mist and early daylight, watch me out with the boat after mackerel and stand watching until entirely hidden. I had seen her so, waiting in the thick grasses, the red hard sand beneath her, and all the evening sky shot with great streaks of light from the dying sun. That had been yesterday. Then had come to-morrow and all the unknown that to-morrow hugs so secret. There must come one now, to undo all this ghastly tangle. I must watch for it. I used to stare at that great rock in a kind of dread as each day we would pass it in the boat. It seemed so utterly grotesque that my forlorn hope, that her most precious life, should rest on that huge block. I knew so little of its hollowed passage. I left it all to chance whether the boat be there or not; I left the whole affair, mounting in risk each day, entirely to my father's words. Was I a fool? Perhaps; but it was impossible by any means the passage could be blocked, but if the boat was gone—that would mean swimming. But I knew water would be sweeter for Sorrel than one hour alone, once I was gone. In the end the matter

went differently, easier than I had expected, but exceedingly terrible in its ease.

4

All along Pascal must have been brooding his wrongs as a dog licks his sores in a corner. All along he must have held some glimmer of hope, there would come one splendid moment when he could face Death triumphant and step back to his old place again. He was so certain he would be the one to learn the passage through the shoals with the greater ease and skill. He saw himself set higher than my father and boasting Sorrel. So much I think must that conceit have bitten into him, when the one moment came for him to show his steadiness he stumbled, and they saw to it he did not stand upright again. Up till then he had remembered the whole delicacy of his position with Death. Looking back on it, it was impossible he could continue so. He fell the day he watched Death handle the brig for the first time with remarkable skill. He stared all huddled up against the rails tearing his handkerchief to threads, twitching his sword in and out again and again from its sheath. And when Death had done and passed the wheel again to me he laughed at Pascal. That old vile laugh was simply like a spur to a sullen horse. He rushed from his corner in his usual wild hurricane fashion and caught it from me. I let him be and moved away; we were well outside the shoals. I think he hardly knew where we were; he was half blind with fear and fury. He could not see anything excepting a crazy vision of his peacock

figure crossing the bay in full daylight, standing, as only Pascal Nicolas Sainte-Jeanne de Tavenne could stand, completely master of his ship, bringing her to anchor beneath the eyes of Sorrel, beneath the eyes of all those on Isola Sound. And right at the very entrance he ran her aground on the outer sandbanks, and even as she heeled gently to her side the men were on him, spitting and tearing like cats, and he was underneath.

They kept me on the brig until very late. Death had one, a thick, bald-headed fellow, a Londoner with slow but stolid intelligence, who acted as spokesman when required. He bade me stay in the cabin until, at a late hour, he came and, with two other men, we went back to the town. There was a light in Sorrel's window, and that comforted me; I wished then more than I had ever done I could speak to her. I wanted to warn her that I had decided on to-morrow for our attempt; I had made up my mind to that as they had fallen on Pascal. I noticed, though the street was unusually noisy, the men seemed to keep away from the palazzo; the great room was nearly empty but for the few groups of men at cards hardly moving as I passed. It was in the room above I had my first knowledge things were now changed. Almost as I sat in my usual seat, the man—his name was Square-Face—jerked with his gun on to the ground and said in a deep grumbling tone:

"Not here." He paused to splutter further, "*Captain*, not here; forward for you." He nodded through the further door. "Forward, down there."

I said, "Whose orders?"

He cleared his throat with much noise and looked uneasy. "The chief's; you know him rightly."

I stared at him very hard. "I am my father's son; he was your chief."

He retorted sullenly: "God's oath, and so was you. And I your servant and each o' us, giving you captain here and captain there. Who run? Not we. Who tricked? Not us! Each man for himself, ain't that *your* way o' putting it? So now, there's Death and there's us. I'll not say he's like Jacob. Maybe he ain't, but he's a shapelier flower than Pascal an' a cuter one than you. Asking your pardon, that is, seeing how you was captain *and* your father's son."

I asked, "When I go through there I'm prisoner; is that it?"

He nodded slowly, keeping his eyes on mine all the while.

"Then what meaning is there to it all, Square-Face? How long do I stay there?"

He drew himself up to his full height and expanded his chest with all the richness of a chief's confidant.

"Rightly nine days; maybe less, maybe more! Till we float the brig, captain."

I said, "What then?"

He shuffled with his feet and muttered: "Eh, what then? Why, maybe one thing, maybe tother."

I asked softly, "Then it cannot hurt you to speak out one of 'em."

He started to trace with the gun on the floor, whis-

ting the while and continually glancing slyly in my direction. He cried suddenly:

“Well, I don’t see how it can, considering you ’ll know yourself soon enough, considering you ’re pretty well cooked, y’ know.” He took a lump of tobacco from his shirt, stuck it well into a corner of his mouth, and added briskly, “You just lie about snug and drowsy-like till we get the brig afloat; then you bring her in for Death; then you take her out—” He cocked his head sideways and blinked at me with half-open eyes. “Leastways just as far as Death thinks.”

I leaned to him eagerly. “Ah!” I whispered, “so far and no further.”

He nodded brightly. “That’s the way. I might ha’ known your father’s son would jump to it brightly. That’s it. You take her out as far as he thinks fit.”

I hardly listened. I was thinking very hard and with as much quiet as I could summon. It was very doubtful I should have chance again to talk to this fellow.

I asked quickly: “It ’ll not run to a week to refloat the brig. Supposing you do it by to-morrow, what then?”

He shook his head indulgently. “No good, captain; nine days. See here; ’t ain’t exactly the brig; it’s the moon.” He made a sudden circle with one hand. “The moon, that’s the real signal; that’s when we move. Bless us, ha’ you forgotten? Each half-year when the moon’s full sized, the Indians drive the cattle in, and we make a mighty racket out in the open behind. Lay in the meat, pile the decks with hides, and make

off as bonny a trader as ever was. That 's what Death 's out for! A mighty long night o' it and a vast piled ship-load to run to New York and take the land fools in with. He wants to get another ship, does Death; he 'll pick his choice in the harbor. Ain't you got me?" He paused and stared closely. "He 'll have a fine show, and a proper way to blind them who 'd look too far; you know how—" He cried angrily: "What's the use o' looking so hot? When a man's gone, what he 's left goes to him who takes. I reckon Death 's thought it out as prettily as any one. 'T ain't a matter o' likes and dislikes wi' him; it 's a sort of scho-lar-ly game. What 'll help trim his sails the neatest, he 'll pinch. And he 'll take it; why not?" He looked at me with wide-eyed contempt; then turned his head to spit, thumped with his gun, and grunted, "Shift ye now, captain."

I said slowly, "Nine days, eh?"

He looked very sly. "That's certain."

I followed him down the jagged narrow stairs to the small underground cell in which we used to store much, from hides and meat to men, but which, as far as I knew, had for a very long time remained empty, it being thought too small and awkward, having so little light. He paused at the door, slipped the bar, and flung it wide; he peered in cautiously, sniffing the while.

He leaned back for me to pass. "Small but snug. Ye'll go the smarter when ye're out; a good sleep, by the Lord. A long stretch 's good as a long drink."

I said: "It's hellishly dark here. This is pretty bad treatment for a man who's still got his use."

He grunted. "Ye'll have enough light to keep you saucy when the day comes. Night—" He stared and chuckled. "Best to be in the dark if ye'd sleep."

He leaned suddenly against the door and became again confidential.

"You've no show to be worrit, ye know. Ye're to rest here. 'T ain't pretty, 't ain't sweet; that I knows well enough; but it's all part o' this scho-lar-ly mind o' Death's. He's got the brain. He don't just finish a man off as you or I might. He just lets him wait on comfortable like until he gets the last out o' him that he can. Then it's good-by. 'Cause why? 'Cause he's no use—in the way like. You bide your time here, captain. I'll see to you; and I'll tell ye this: there's no need for ye' to worrit on your lady. Each one o' us we'd go first if need be, not she. She's to wait; you're to wait; quite safe like and not worrit in any way. Good night to ye, captain. Sleep well; ye'll not be lonely. Daylight may not be to your fancy, and the less you worrit the easier ye'll lie. Good night, *captain.*"

I could hear the tramp of his feet up the stairs and their echo getting less and less.

5

The scholarly mind of Death. He knew it; he believed in it. I suppose all those others, dull-witted, passionate, and lustful as they were, they also knew.

It would be new to them; like children they would look on fascinated and admiring. The mind that worked with facts and problems rather than the naked sword, the man who waited in his killing until everything was neatly and perfectly set out before him. The master chess-player. What sort of move was this, then? What manner of check? Some sort of reason, but what cunning behind it?

It took me a long while before I became accustomed to the darkness. I must have been very tired. I fancy I would have slept standing until I felt the extreme coolness of the wall on my back. That roused me. Then quite suddenly I was full awake. Wide-eyed, and staring into the pitch darkness; straining, conscious suddenly of a very great terror, certain I was not alone. It seemed as if at that instant something snapped in my brain, something vital of the moment passed out of me. I was nothing more than the desperately frightened youth rushing through the fog on Bristol wharf, visioning shapes, hearing footsteps pursuing and passing, dying away, stealing back through the mist. I had forgotten my manhood; I had sunk so low that the quiet of a dark room could in one instant become a live, pitiless horror! Why listen for sound when the room was so still? Why strain against the darkness when there was nothing possible to see? What had that fellow meant then by "Ye'll not be lonely"? Listen again. Nothing. Not a sound, not a movement; complete stillness. Look again. Strain all the harder in the darkness and find nothing but darkness; no shape nor form even. Just the

blackness of a room shut away from all light, shrouded in as it were by soft, thick curtains.

I was getting calmer now, finding a stronger grip on my senses. I remembered there was a thin slit to the wall nearly opposite to the door which would in the morning give some light. I must wait till then; I must think reasonably until then. Men had gone mad about slighter things than a dark room. I must not go mad. I must wait for that ray of light. I could go on comfortably once I had seen, once I knew. The scholarly mind of Death. To put me in a night-bound cell and leave me there; to test my nerve as I supposed he had done that night at Bristol. The horror of that still remained. But even in a fog there was space; in this room there was no space, neither was there any hope of seeing even to its narrow corners until the light came. I could hope for nothing, not even for sleep, until there came some small break in this dread darkness. Get on with the night; wait for the day. That fellow Square-Face had sworn he would be back in the morning. He had spoken of food. He would not have done that had he thought to find a madman or a dead body. For such you did not bring meat. Wait for the day. That would mean only eight days before they drove the cattle. I must keep quiet; remember that.

I would have much business on hand then. Sorrel would be waiting. I was on the floor now, sitting, sprawling my legs out, shutting my eyes, covering my face with my hands. I found I could rest better so if I shut out the living silence of the darkness.

And, after all, the madness of that solitary night was such a foolish thing, the agony of what hideous unknown, it might be, holding so small a trifle. I felt as if my foot was wet; I became doubly sure when I moved it. It seemed damp and sticky as if it had touched thick, muddy water. I put out my hand and touched the floor, felt cautiously and wondering. There was water. I brought my hand close to my face and held it there, straining as if to see and seeing nothing, only conscious of the sickly smell of my fingers; they also were sticky like the floor. I knew the smell. I knew that stickiness; not water, but blood. And I spent the rest of the night staring at the space just beyond my feet, waiting. Waiting for the first ray of light to pierce that narrow slit and show me Pascal's dead body sprawling on its back.

CHAPTER VIII

I

I SAT back and laughed. Squatted back against the door and laughed until I choked, until the tears raced down my cheeks. Most scholarly mind! I might have known that only such a jester as Death could make this grotesque move in his scheme of play. Pascal. Poor empty broken body of Pascal to haunt me through the night, to rest with me these next days and by his very silence torture my miserable soul to its final end. Pascal to be the one, not Death. Pascal to have the final say in my wretched life. Pascal, whose fingers must have itched time and again to get my throat, should now be picked upon to twist my brain the further. Happy Pascal! Even a dead man had his uses with Death. Not a pretty sight. Not a graceful figure, bloodied and cut about the body, torn and filthified in his dress. Not the most pleasing of companions for a man already racked in torment; not a sweet bedfellow for some one to whom sleep might give clearer reason. Eight days and eight nights. The room was gradually becoming lighter; I could see well enough now; there was little worth the seeing. A pile of hides to one side, some broken casks to the other; not very much room; yet the space very well cleared. You could not hide a body. There were

no crevices, no litter; you could not get away from it; there was too little room. The two of us alive, we would have got in each other's way. The one dead lessened such pressure, yet we would be cramped.

We were to hold council with each other, Pascal and I, until the moon was full, until I should be needed to steer for Death. If I could steer. And if not, still I might be worth the keeping as frolic for the spitting crowd until, in their impatient way, they grew tired. I had wondered what further amusement Death might find for them. But that had nothing to do with me; that belonged to the future. This was the present; this was a threatening barrier between Sorrel and me. Somehow it had to be passed. This cell, this companionship with a dead man, they were but small things to the horror which faced her; I must prevent that horror. To become accustomed to the silence, to become accustomed to the dead. That to be done for her. It was better while the daylight lasted, but the slit was so small, there would be little of it. To become accustomed to the almost continual night, that was different. Shut in with a dead man. Locked in, buried in. Unable to move lest in the dark my foot would stumble against his body; dreading to sit still lest I might hear some sound; knowing there was nothing there, only the dead Pascal.

I used to long for Square-Face, morning and evening, with my food. I almost loved him, just because he was human, because he walked and talked, because I knew he came from the outside world where others moved. He reminded me of that world; he

reminded me life was not one continual grave where the dead and the living together were shut away. I used to try to keep him with me. It seemed wonderful to hear his tongue. It helped my despair; it eased my mind. Of course he knew it. He would become worried and uneasy.

"Now, lookee here," he would mutter. "Lookee here; this ain't fair." He would jerk his thumb to the stairs and whisper knowingly. "*He* knows, bless you; he knows each one o' us, how we go, how we speak. 'T ain't fair, not to me nor to you, you holding on to me. You just don't worrit. Your lady's all right, now, What more d' you want? Go easy like. 'T ain't pretty for ye; 't ain't sweet, I well know; but if ye asks for trouble ye'll get it. Well, then, why worrit?" And he would shake his head and tramp away.

I lost count of time; that terrified me. I thought the day had passed and gone and Death had gone out alone on the brig with Sorrel. I remember asking Square-Face; and when he said five days only had passed, I cursed him for a liar; I told him he was as bloody a plotter and schemer as Death, taunted him for being a coward and slamming the door in my face, which he had done the instant he caught the tone of my voice. I raved at him until I could feel throat bursting and swelling, until I could feel such hammerings about my body, I checked myself from sheer fright. I never heard the man leave me. I had a vision of his heavy face and bulging eyes peering through the grille; then I suppose he went away.

All that day I never moved from my bed of hides. Square-Face came again in the evening. I could hear him muttering and sighing as he saw I had not touched my meat or drink. He came over to me and stood breathing heavily. I could hear him click with his tongue, "Tch, tch!" Then, suddenly frightened at what I might do, rushed to the door, bolting it behind him.

That was the night the rats came for the first time. The first sound, and all those maddening hammers were beating up and down my body, and my hands were at my throat as if to ease the strain. But the dead make no noise. It was rats. *Pitter-pat, pitter-pat, pitter-pat*; their hard little feet, their sharp little nails over the stones, ever and ever over the stones. Squeaking, breathing, smelling. I could hear their snuffling as they crept and nosed every inch of the place. There came a crash and a shiver of glass, and I knew by the rush of feet they had smashed my wine-flask and raced back to their holes. Then out again. *Pitter-pat, pitter-pat*, and their sudden increased and now fearless squeaking. . . . Pascal.

With the daylight they had gone. Poor Pascal, poor mutilated body, worthless excepting as meat. I stared at him compassionately: untidy, scarred, and beastly, but the great crimson coat still flaring and gaudy; the jeweled brooch at his torn throat still gleaming; even the wig—some joker must have thrust it back upon his head—it still flowed upon his shoulders.

How lonely a body, breaking and rotting away

here, already forgotten, never mourned for! Had he a soul? Why, so must all men. And I could fancy it now, wailing and wringing its hands as it gazed down on this pitiful object, once so glorious and boastful, so thoughtless and devilish, now so carelessly cast away. Dust built upon dust. Yet I had no bitter thought of him. It was not possible now.

I could remember him only as the gay reckless Pascal, the fighting brave Pascal. So many times had I seen that scarlet dashing figure at my side, cutting, thrusting, laughing. So many times had he and I kept watch together, passed nights together; talked, idled, quarrelled; sworn friendship again scarce an hour after. But not this last time. I had never before crossed him with women. He must be first there.

So untidy. He would have fretted like a child to see how disordered his dress was; possibly it fretted him now. That was not fair to a dead man. I think it was my sudden memory of his last passionate cry in the palazzo, "I am Pascal Aurilly Nicolas Sainte-Jeanne de Tavenne . . ." and the vain gesture toward his own magnificence which moved me suddenly to cross to where he lay. To wipe those still foolish lips and the vain cruel hands; to straighten the torn dress, and smooth, as far as was possible, the laces and the ribbons. He must have died hating me; possibly this might soften his hatred. Pascal, the romancer, the unscrupulous. The man who mourned his ship. That was the thing worth remembering.

Seven days passed. I knew that, for Square-Face had told me the day in the morning. Seven days. The time was drawing in; I must be ready. I had become familiar with my surroundings, at peace with them, even. The gray daylight, the long night; the foul air, the horrible silence. By now eaten so well into me I could have slept, had not the rats kept me awake. Not only that but an odd kind of duty kept me watching for them rather than sleeping, the duty of comradeship, the queer understandable code between the dead and the living, between Pascal and me. Had he risen alive at my feet in all his rascality, I would have been ready and waiting for him; but dead it was not decent to let rats treat him so. So I pitted myself against their forwardness; I found a stick and set to beat them back. It kept me occupied; it kept me from brooding. That was a very good thing for me.

Looking back on that time, on those frightful days, I doubt if I felt any kind of hope. I do not think for one instant I saw any light. I held on to nothing then; I simply clung to my sanity in a dull kind of way, as a drowning man will cling to any spar. I simply forced myself to live for that ninth day, to make some desperate attempt when that time came. I had no plans. How could a man have plans when he was buried away out of sight? How can he build on chance when a door has bolts and bars, and the iron is thick and age-old with strength? And

yet I had to stay quiet. It would not do to break out again, as I had done once with Square-Face. I had to hold on to my brain to the very last no matter how ghastly that last moment might be; I must still keep cool. I must fight against not only madness but futility. There were moments when the futility of it all clogged my brain and all but broke my spirit.

By the eighth evening I was very tired. I lay all day heaped upon the hides. I never saw or heard Square-Face come with my last meal. I never heard the rats. I was aware of nothing except my enormous tiredness, but I could not sleep comfortably, the hides smelt so; arid, close, harsh, smell. As they did in old Bride's office. We used to stack them high up against the rafters; there were too many of them; I had meant to tell Bride we should be sharper with our market . . . but Bride was dead. You could not tell a dead man business. Bride was dead; they had spiked him to his desk. How was it possible for a man to sleep quietly, comfortably? There was so little room for breathing, so hard for sleeping . . . bunks—ships' bunks, I suppose, were always hard like this. I would have to become accustomed to this hardness. My father . . . I was my father's son. But I was not a godly man like my father. My father was a Buccaneer of God, my poor father, my wild, silly father. How the sea roared! You could not play chess with so great a pitch to the ship; you could not play chess anyway with Death. He laughed too much . . . he ran you down sideways amid hills, chasing you with his laughter, his face . . . it was not

a face; it was a great mouth stretched to one tremendous grin—you could not escape his face. Not even darkness could cover it away. That roaring sea. Like the beating surf at Santa Verde, like the muffled wind among those huge trees in the forests outside Santa Verde, as it must whistle up and down in and out of the streets, the narrow square at Santa Verde . . . a cold wind. A thin chilly wind. There would be neither houses nor people left to go into them from its cold; we had swept the place clean; we had gone through it as a man with a scythe will pass through a corn-field. . . .

If I could get my fingers into my ears perhaps I might drown this sea; perhaps I could get away from this everlasting tumult! You cannot escape the sea. Not even in Somerset; it washes there. . . . Booming, booming . . . like my father's voice, like my father's God . . . "*They that go down in ships and do business upon great waters . . .*" To what end? For what purpose? A woman's face . . . Ah! Sorrel, Sorrel!

3

It was the sound of my own voice crying so loudly out which woke me; I started up, still calling, so certain her face was near me. I leaped from my bed to the middle of the room and stood there, dizzy and frightened, unable for the moment to realize where I was. So much for dreams. An empty cell, a cold gray room, and the first dim light of morning. At

the door, staring, was Square-Face, a jug in one hand, a dish in the other; on the floor Pascal still stretched wide.

Said Square-Face earnestly: "Curse me, ye've a tongue for hollering; fair split my ears with y' calling. Ye know this comes o' worriting. Don't drink, don't eat, don't sleep; 't is more than any belly can stand. Not that y' ain't laid heavy this while, but bless me if it's cheered you much, not that it would to any man with that there." He bent to stare at Pascal and turned away with a grimace. "Curse me if he could." He spat disgustedly. "Fair turns y' liver." He said coaxingly: "Now, captain, do ye sit and cheer y' stomach a bit; warm y' self like. Here's red wine, fruity and rich, fit for any tongue; now, captain, just you turn to and stop this worriting."

I hardly heard him. I had become suddenly very wide-awake and very clear in seeing. Not so far from where I had lain there was chalked a set number of squares and upon them just three figures. Two red, one green. Even in the gloom it did not need a sharper-eyed man than I easily to define those three faces. My own to one end; at the other solitary and desolate, Sorrel, my queen, right between but very close a green pawn—Death. And chalked right beneath, "Check-mate. . . ."

I could hear the sulky voice of Square-Face: "Curse me, mighty grand and huffy, ain't y'? Fair sort o' treatment to him that treats y' fair." He slammed the bowl and pitcher to the ground. "Last time

t'night; noon t'morrow, an' ye 'll be wringing y' hands for the sight o' me, *captain*—faugh!" And he spat contemptuously.

I said sharply, "What day is this?"

He muttered sullenly, "Ninth."

I asked quietly, "What of the brig?"

He winked cunningly. "Pretty and neat as ever was. By t'night she 'll be ready and standing by, leastways if th' wind keeps fine. Waiting fur—Captain." He laughed, highly amused.

I repeated softly: "Waiting for me. You start out to drive in the cattle this evening?"

He nodded: "Most o' us is gone already; by the night we 'll all be cleared out. Death, he has it we 'll be in again and ready by midday. Maybe th' brig's crew, but if he wants a fat cargo and a full galley he 'll still hold anchor or go without. There's not a man o' the lot who 'll not be three sheets in th' wind an' snuggle down to it like a duck in water. T'morrow!" He shrugged contemptuously. "Y' father could ha' taught him better."

I felt suddenly very strong and harsh with energy; I looked at the chalked squares and those three grim figures and smiled. Death had come to me in the night; hung over me, laughed above me. No wonder he had seemed so near to me in my sleep. He had done this thing at my very side; he had given me a sign at last of his final play, of my final moment. A most significant and rather terrible sign, but to me like a whip to a lagging horse, like a wind to a stifled man. Such was my mood then I would have

cheerfully sent him a message of gratitude; he had done the one thing I needed most, shocked me back to life.

I felt most desperately hungry. I squatted down by the food and started to eat and drink, as I had not done since I had been buried here. I saw Square-Face watching with surprise and interest.

Said he, "Curse me, then; y' can eat?"

I nodded to him, my mouth full, and drank to him, gulping so that the wine splashed to the floor.

"As much as any man"; and laughed. "Salue, salue!"

He pulled his heavy lips and surveyed me thoughtfully. "I ain't such a bad sort," he mumbled through his fingers. "I do what I can, captain. After t'night, ain't likely I'll be here in t' morning. Curse me where I may be; but I'll see to you fair and proper, curse me I will; 'cause there's no knowing where ye'll be nor where I'll be. Death, he has it so; and I'll not say he ain't got a scho-lar-ly mind, but when we all gets merry like, bless me ye've got to start over again."

I said, looking him very hard in the face: "Well, bring me my last meal when the time comes. Serve it up as trim as any ship, and I'll drink with you, perhaps."

He looked greedy and wiped his mouth. "Now, that's reasonable talk; that's proper friendly. I'll serve ye! Who'll we drink to, eh?"

I tore the meat wolfishly with my fingers and grinned up at his idiotic face! "Why, the best man,"

I retorted. "The best man of us three." I waved my hand so as to encircle Pascal, him, and me, but he did n't understand; and after all, as it was my joke, how could he? But it amused him all the same, and I could hear him chuckling as he lumbered away.

4

I put the empty dish away from me and went back to my bed of hides. So he had come in the night. I wondered idly what might have happened had he found me awake instead of sleeping. It occurred to me then I had run a very great risk; awake, and in that confused fevered state of mind, I might have done anything had I seen him. I could not think I would have been any sort of match for him then, and had I been, there was the restless spirit of Isola Sound, which hardly ever slept or if it did only with pricked ears and half-shut eyes. This was best. The risk was bad enough, but I knew it might have been a million times worse. Check-mate. . . . Not quite, not yet.

I bent forward and picked up the figure of Sorrel. No man, I was sure, but Death could have conceived so grotesque a tragedy as this one of his own making. To have her memory so near to me, to see her face so close to me. Put there to mock me. To remind me of romance and how I had lost romance, to remind me of hope and the futility of hope. I had endeavored toward something too subtle and wonderful for my understanding. I struggled. I had pitted myself against life, against God. Like a man proud in the

building of a city, so I had built mine, glorying in each stone, boastful in my heart. And the walls had toppled in. Where there had been once a great and shining beauty, there now stretched a desolate waste. Ruin, ashes, dead earth. There was Sorrel. It would be worse for her than me. Life with its pain, its disgrace and failure, yet could not cloak for me the sweetness of her memory.

Different for her. She could have only bitterness; there could be nothing in her life now so vile as my remembrance. There would be the child, my child, bearing my name, having my blood; reminding her at every moment of the day of the father. Yet it would be different for him, for she loved all children.

I tucked the figure away in my shirt. I would not leave it here. Whatever might happen, and there were countless things that might, she would not be left for any man in Isola Sound; there would not be one single sign or trace of her. Even this carved ivory, they should not find that for their amusement. It was wonderful how strong in my mind I was then. In so short a time I seemed to have grown in strength and energy. I had neither weapons, defense, nor friends; there was not one single person who was not against me, yet not even in the old reckless days had I felt so-hardened and alive for fighting.

Not so long now before Square-Face would be back with my evening meal. Poor Square-Face; poor fool; it was impossible not to be sorry for him; I knew how easy a tool he would be. I crossed to Pascal. All the care I had given him during our

time together had been as nothing compared to the one night I had missed in confused sleep. Poor Pascal. Yet even now his rotten body could give some help, could give some aid to the man he loathed with such madness, and the woman he wanted with such lustful desire.

I started to loosen the great sash he wore about his stomach. I could remember how he had bought it with such pride in Spanish Town and swaggered with it in the streets whenever we touched any port. How its gay colors would glitter in the sun, and Pascal would twist the tassels about his fingers or hold them up to the light so he might watch their gleaming in childish delight. Down here, not even its brightness could show. It was a dull heavy band sagging loosely now round his dead flesh. It came away quite easily, too heavy and long for a dead man, but what I needed for a living one.

Later than usual, and a little flustered, Square-Face came. Thumped the dish to the ground with the jug and stood breathing heavily and mopping his brow.

Said he crossly: "Curse me if I've had such a day. Hurry here and hurry there, on the brig and off the brig. First Death must bring it in, then he must take it out, 'cause why? 'Cause he's a blamed hustler o' men and don't give a damn to their stomachs!" He glared at me with bulging eyes and a hot shining face.

I said, "Is the brig outside?"

He nodded sullenly, "An' two men on her. Could n't

get another to stay, not even him with all his games. All gone inland, and curse me if I know why those two stayed, unless it be they're new and fresh like, and full o' th' devil's fear o' him an' his face."

I asked quickly, "Who are they?"

"None you know." He was staring moodily at the wine. "Raw as their own faces is of any hairs, off an Indiaman; scared, too. He won't keep 'em long."

I said softly, "He 's been here."

I never saw a man look so astonished; his eyes seemed to start from their sockets. "Here! Him?"

I nodded, enjoying his amazement.

He wiggled his tongue between his teeth and stared about the cell stupefied. "Curse me," he muttered. "Curse me stiff!"

I said, "Look in that corner there; see for yourself." And stretched to the wine. He glowered angrily, then screwed his eyes toward the corner, and, struck by a sudden curiosity, crossed to it. The sight of the familiar chalked chess-board and the two colored figures were too much for him. He bent forward, his hands on his knees, and stared in complete stupefaction. "Bless me," he mumbled. "Bless me, what a man."

From behind his square stolid body looked almost comic; it was easy for my purpose. I jumped at him lightly rather than heavily, and he went down with a flop; I could hear the breath blown from his lungs. "Huh!" he gasped, and then let out a squawk like a bird, "Hoik. . ."

I had his hands behind and together, and the sash around them tight and knotted, and, desperate as I

was, the sight of his purple face when I turned him round made me laugh.

He whined indignantly: "Now, this ain't fair. This ain't like shipmates—"

I cut him short. "I should n't worry what it's like; it's my way of dealing with men. Lie still now. An armless man with a body as lumpish as yours can only be clumsy. I want your belt. I'm not going to steal it, but for the moment it suits you better here." I knotted his legs while he threatened me with a tangle of furious words. "Now your knife; that I am taking." I got up and stood surveying him. "I fancy you're well stuffed, whatever you may say—long enough to last until some one remembers you. I'm sorry we can't have that toast; but you'll get it one day, and you won't be lonely."

He bawled passionately: "Curse me, y' won't either! He's got eyes, he has. What was he before? What was he all along? You knows, that's what y' father had him for; a bloody spy, a stealing, crawling cat. He'll be watching; he's got eyes all around, and ears all around! Lonely? Not you. You watch out, that's all; you mind y' kidney—captain." Then he suddenly became maudlin with anxiety and indignation. I could hear his voice, as I closed the iron door and shot the bar, moaning up the passage: "'Tain't fair. That's what comes o' being friendly like. What'll I do?" Then a last defiant yell: "You watch out. Ye're done, that's what ye are; I'm telling you that, —ye're finished. . . ."

But his bawling died away entirely as I hurried down the passage; by the time I reached the steps to the room not even the echo could be heard.

5

The place had a deserted and unused air. Dust on the table, soiled glasses and meat heavy in fat, a broken bottle on the floor, the glass scattered, and a patch of color where the wine had stained. I stood listening. Not a sound of any sort or kind, neither in the palazzo or from outside, a deathly air of desertion. It was not enough that there should be no noise from the outside. I wanted to look for myself from the window, but I had not forgotten Death; I knew very well how much truth there was in Square-Face's talk.

In the end I crawled on my stomach to the windows, and, pressing close to the wall there, counted on the shadows for concealment. A great white moon gave light enough, whitened the beach, the stone huts, the old ruins, gave to the stillness an uncanny cold appearance. I noticed with bitterness how many boats lay close in or lulled on the water. So easy and so tempting to start boldly right from the beach, but this silence could not be entirely counted upon; there were too many corners I could not see into. I slunk down again as I left the window and out into the long dim passage which led directly to Sorrel's room. I remember my sudden feeling of apprehension in case she was not there. That I might knock on the

door and open it, only to find the room empty. And then quite suddenly the door opened and she was standing there.

For the one moment we stood staring at each other, and to my mind there was something very terrible in our meeting, for it was the first time we had faced each other entirely alone since we had looked one another in the face that evening in the library at Plover's Cove.

She said quietly, "I was waiting for you." She continued: "Don't come farther in; you might be seen. The light in my room would make it dangerous."

She came forward a little. I saw she still wore the riding-dress and her hair was still knotted in a colored handkerchief. I searched her face desperately to see how deep her suffering might have been. She was very pale and very thin. Lines at her mouth, hollows beneath her eyes, yet they showed as before that fearless brave spirit. Her grief these last weeks must have been immense; somehow I do not think any one could have shown such fortitude.

I saw she was holding out a pair of pistols; I stared at them, not a little astonished. She explained: "They were sent to me. The girl Quita brought them. I was to use them against any one who might force in here; that was the message. I never had occasion; they will be useful now."

I took them from her, frowning. 'There seemed no end to the oddness of Death. That he had sent them I knew very well. It would not have been Pascal or any other man; such a gesture only suited

very well the humor of one man. I 'handed back one to Sorrel; the other I stuck in my belt.

"You 'had better keep this." And as she took it, "How did you know I was coming?"

She shook her head. "I knew nothing. I simply knew you would come one night. I was sure 'of that."

Her confidence for the moment stunned me. I could only gape and then turn, muttering, "It is this way: keep close to me."

We had to go back to the council-room and then down to the great hall and across it to the farther end. Just before we made that wild plunge I saw hanging a lantern, and I remember how thankfully I snatched it. Our probable lack of light had been one of my greatest concerns.

As I look back on the hazard of our escape I think nothing was so terrifying as that stumble across the darkened hall with its gaunt pillars and grotesque shadows; its one vast side open to the outer world. It was at its end there ran the jagged steps to cellars and passages which eventually would lead to the rock. Once there, it was safer, but not the security I desired until we were farther underground and secret.

It was longer than I thought, and with each step my anxiety increased; then quite suddenly round a bend we came straight upon a blank rough wall. I put the lantern down and stared at it with dismay; six steps from there, and then to grope for the slab with the ring. When my father had explained this way and I had made that measurement there still seemed nothing but uneven stone ground, with no

sign whatever of any movable slab. When I had stared puzzled, he was only pleased and amused, and had then shown how, cunningly fitted into the stone itself, contrived to the exact color even, there was a ring. Of course it escaped me now. Twice I thought I must have measured wrongly and counted again and failed again; then suddenly my blade jarred. I was digging eagerly round and under, loosening, easing, until stiffly it raised to position. It was heavy, that slab. Ages I supposed it had lain still until it must have almost joined in again with the stone it had been hewn from. I think it resented this disturbance; to the last it clung to its own and then finally broke from its socket with a grunt like a live thing and a slither of pebbles and sand.

I peered down into the cavern which stretched beneath; swung the light as far as it was possible; peered and listened. I could see but little and hear nothing at all.

I had decided, much as it dismayed me, that Sorrel should be the first to descend. This because of the certain security of the cave beneath; while if I left her lonely at the top, there was no knowing what danger might lurk in all those twisting passages we had come through. There was a chain hanging just to the side of the gap. I pulled and heard its rattle on the ground below; that was well.

I said, "I shall fix the lantern to your back; that will give you some sort of light, anyway, when you reach the bottom." I think she was going to demur, for she stood for a moment silent with knitted brows,

then without a word turned for the lantern to be fastened. I was able to do this very securely with the belt she wore. She sat then at the edge of the hole, her feet dangling. I brought the chain to her. I felt her hands touch mine as they slipped beneath them to clasp the cold links. I muttered: "The first drop to the chain may hurt you more than the actual going down. Hold fast with your feet as well. I will steady it from the top. For God's sake, hold and go slowly."

She dropped instantly. And the last I saw was her pale upturned face, at first so close to mine, then gradually disappearing entirely as she was swallowed into the blackness. I hung above the gap in an agony of apprehension, watching the wavering light growing smaller and smaller, then steadied suddenly; and I could just hear her voice, tiny and indistinct:

"I am down."

I followed immediately with hardly a look back into the passage. There was something horrible in her loneliness down there. I had to get the slab back first—hang with one hand, my feet twisted so as to make up as far as possible for the other, which fumbled with the stone. We must have lost nearly fifteen minutes while I tore at it. And when I had done and to my triumph, seen it thud into place, I could hardly use my hand. Its first touch against the iron was the most terrible pain. But I had something else to think of even as I swung in midair; it had suddenly occurred to me with sickening dread, we were now most completely trapped. If the opening at the other end

was in some manner blocked there was no returning up the chain. I could only just work the slab back into place, but to hang there with one hand and press with the other was entirely impossible.

On the ground, breathless and painful, I asked, "Did that hurt you?"

She shook her head: "Hardly at all. Your hand—" She stared. I stared with her; it had a bruised appearance. I thought grimly, "If it comes to fighting, there goes my right." I said aloud, "It has been worse."

We were underneath the town now. A rough uneven way with damp walls and thick sand, into which our feet sank over the ankles. It smelled very strongly of the sea, and as we dragged along there came its faint dull roar. It was here I started to explain my plan, not an easy thing. Aware all the while I had no business to be explaining anything even half as desperate as this. It all had to do with the hardships of men, not women; yet I had deliberately been the cause of forcing her to join in them. But she listened; she even questioned about the brig. We might have been on Exmoor again, talking in the fashion of our old dead comradeship.

And the the sea became more than a distant murmur, very distinct and very strong, and keen its smell. We came sharply through the dimness upon the very gate into the rock, a great rough bulging thing and half-way up, what appeared a cave-mouth; there was a heaped mound of rocks which brought one right to that opening. We went up this together. I held her, and we helped each other. A slow clumsy business,

and I felt the uselessness of my hand more than I dared express. At the top it was but a few inches down to the level. The smell of sea seemed very strong here and the rush of it very clear. I thought foolishly that the sides must be very thin, so distinctly could I hear its soft lapping. I had paused to stare back into the passage we had left, and Sorrel must have moved on. At her call I turned to see the light some little way from me; then she spoke again, this time quickly and louder:

“Careful, go carefully. There is water here; this is the sea.”

6

She came to meet me as I half stumbled toward her. As she stood pressed against the wall she swung the lantern outward. She said, “Look!”

We stood on a ledge about six feet wide. How far it ran ahead it was impossible to see, but at our side possibly the same number of feet down was the sea. So much for my stupidity about the thinness of the walls. I had heard lapping right enough, here at my very feet. I stood staring down foolishly. Tiny ripples ran over the water. It washed the sides gently, here and there sucked against the rock, and made odd gurgles.

I muttered, “My God! O my God!”

She said: “What does this mean? What has happened?”

I said dully: “I cannot think. It was always dry; not even the tide would come to the sea opening.”

"Then you think some one might have known of this; would it be possible to break through this rock?"

I nodded. "It could be blasted."

She asked, "How far have we now to go?"

I was thinking that supposing this had been done on purpose and the outer hole was blocked, why, we were rats in a trap, for the sea would soon mount to the edge of the cave-mouth we had come in by and flood the further passages. There was no getting up that chain and back. I tried to steady my voice and answered, "Not far, if I remember." I said sharply, "Let us get on."

The horror of that walk lives with me still. In that vast blackness our lantern seemed to give out no light at all. I could hardly see at all ahead. It seemed to me we were wandering on endlessly, passing from one blackness directly into another of even greater density, swallowed in by the somber majesty of its enormity. Not even our footsteps could drown that continual lapping of the sea, that steady sucking of water. She was very close behind me, clinging to my belt and arm. The farther we walked the more was I certain there had been no such agony of danger as this; no, not even the cell with the rats and Pascal dead. You could fight rats, beat them back; you could not beat back water. Slow rising water in a cavern of blackness; continually sounding water in an otherwise tomb of perfect silence.

I muttered over my shoulder, "It cannot be far now."

I felt her squeeze my arm. The warmth of her touch renewed for me, for one instant, my courage.

A short-lived spell! We seemed to be sloping downward. I called to Sorrel and asked her if she noticed. Her voice went echoing away into the vastness. "I think we are." Then with a greater sharpness, "My feet are wet."

We were on level again but lower down, the water swishing round our feet, driving against our ankles. With a quiet persistence it would clutch at our legs and let go with reluctance, only to swish back again a little higher each time. Sorrel said suddenly:

"I must stop; I must twist my skirt up more; it hinders."

I stood while she fumbled; and in that pause, I could hear the ominous sighing water all the more clearly. Somewhere it was dripping like rain; and I wondered if that was from where it ran. I stared down. Creaming and white where it swirled round our feet, black as the place itself where in the center it was moving sluggishly, like clouds on a sultry night. Never get out of this, never get away from this sea. Sorrel must have finished her dress. I felt her hand suddenly on my arm and her voice very near.

"There, there!" she cried.

Just a little ahead of us, no wider than the width of a sword, gleamed light.

Later—much later—we had clambered to that gap and found the boat snug and dry; we had rowed round the face of that grim, gray rock and turned directly toward the brig outside the shoals.

The night was overhung with great clouds which swept across the face of the moon like over-passing

birds in flight, their wings outstretched. Uneasily, I wished it had been possible to keep to the farther side of the rock and not come out in a direct line with the town. When, for some seconds, the moon sailed free it was possible we might be seen from the beach. It was tedious rowing. Infinitely more difficult than handling the brig; it meant trusting entirely to chance, feeling every inch of the way.

We must have been a quarter of a mile from the brig when Sorrel leaned to me. "Do you hear anything?"

I lay on my oars; for a moment we drifted. I could hear nothing. The wash of the sea at our sides, the louder roar of its break on the beach. Away in the distance the light from her room in the old palazzo still shone through the darkness; then suddenly, as the full light of the moon shone out, I could quite clearly see the whiteness of the buildings, and beyond and very far away a red glow against the horizon. I muttered to myself: "Torches. They must have reached the plains." Aloud, I said, "What is it you hear?"

She paused. She had her head turned in a listening attitude. She said again, "There is something." She looked very steadily across to me. "Some one swimming." The clouds passed, and we were in darkness again.

It seemed to me there could be no silence in the world like this; even the wash of the sea was subdued; it was entirely still. Then suddenly, right in our wake, there came the faint sound, a gentle splash like a fish. I bent to Sorrel.

"Change with me."

She hesitated. I could see her face drawn and pale, her eyes opened very wide.

I persisted, "Quickly, there is little time."

Reluctantly she passed to my place, and I sunk into the stern. I said softly:

"This may be nothing. Do you row? Remember you will have to go very slowly; feel with the oars. Keep as straight as possible with the brig's light." Then we moved again. I could hear the creak of the rowlocks.

Struck by a sudden thought, I drew the pistols from my belt and passed them to her. Neither of us said anything, but from the way she glanced at them I knew she understood; to see them, one each side of her on the seat, eased me enormously. For myself I had my knife, that was all I required.

Once again the moon broke out an instant only, and then was gone again; but that instant was sufficient for me to see, not so far behind, broad ripples of water forever coming closer and closer. I took out the seat entirely so I could kneel on the boards. I poised there—filled with a savage glee this would be the last move on the board; whatever might happen, I should be the one to cry, "Check-mate."

He came up shaking the water from his face like a dog; he came up laughing, so that I could fancy how red the scar on his face must shine out in company with his jeering mouth. A sudden sharp pull on the oars from Sorrel jerked the boat from him so that instead of our facing sideways he leered up right at

the stern. This gave me a better chance than I even hoped for. I gave him no time to reach too far out from the sea. I had my hands on his throat, and I was pressing with all my weight his head backward and downward. Like great bands his arms were around me, and as I pressed on his throat so did I force my whole body back against that enormous dragging down to the sea. We were very near to each other now. It did not need a moon to show me his face. I could hear him laugh again; his old ironic chuckle of amusement close to my ear. It seemed impossible I could have any hope against that terrible hold; it seemed incredible my hands could make any impression on that iron neck. I dug with my fingers until they seemed dead and swollen, impossible foolish things straining against a rock. His were the master hands; not mine. They had the cunning, the power and swiftness to rend flesh, to strangle life.

Why, I had no life. I was numb; I was dead; I was hopelessly defeated. I was no more than a child in his terrible embrace. But I had my hands on his throat; I told myself that between my ghastly breathing. I had my hands there, and to the floor of the sea I would keep them there.

With a great sob of pain, I dug with my thumbs; I shut my eyes and drove inward, inward against those terrible veins. I thought I felt his arms loosen; mad thought, vain thought! But I shouted, "Ha!" and drove them farther in; and again it seemed as if they weakened, and again with most tremendous fury I cried, "Ha!" and spread my fingers the wider and the

harder about his throat. There came the moon, and I had a glimpse of a mouth that gaped, and eyes that stared out at me wide-fixed. With an effort I should never have thought myself capable of, I flung my whole weight on to my hands so that he dropped; his head went lower and lower. To his shoulders, to his neck, to his chin. It was then his mouth suddenly jerked hideously and his arms fell away altogether, balanced, it seemed, for a second in midair, then dropped flopping, clutching, waving, into the water, so his face went down inch by inch, farther and farther, until his whole head was covered. But I held him there. Straining down to the water, watching the water, the ripples broadened and gradually died away, the bubbles burst to the surface and then ceased entirely. Until where there had been much tumult there was nothing but calm.

7

I remember turning to Sorrel and muttering, "It is done!" I know I laughed foolishly, gaping at my hands and stammering, "I can't use my hands." I know in the end I sat huddled in the boat, while she still rowed, and from time to time I gave directions. And I remember, too, when we reached the brig's side it was she who went aboard first and, with a pistol ready, sent one of the two men down to help me up. These things I remember very well. And I remember swaying as I stood giving orders to the two and giggling like an idiot at their bewilderment and the scared flurry in which they rushed to their work. But above

all do I remember leaning against the rail staring back at Isola Sound. Empty for the present of all her rabble, she lay meek in her dignity of ancient beauty, sad in her desolation. Time, and she would rot away entirely: there would sprout grasses again, dust on dead men's bones; jungle beasts would roam there. Into the earth, which proudly uplifted her, she would sink, by that earth to be covered. I had come there as a youth; I had rioted, swaggered, boasted in her court-yards. In my life to come she would stand out as the symbol of my dishonor, as the remembrance of my blind endeavor after adventure. Paler still now; as some thin vaporous cloud trailed over the moon, so a certain dimness closed about it, giving an unearthly mourning aspect. Passing now. The great naked ribs of *The Five Wounds*, white in the moon, sinking down into the sands, drifting on with the tides. Only the crucifix remained, high against the heaven, in the moon sublime and glorious, knowing, despite the scars, infinite wisdom. All things pass; only God remains.

We sat together, Sorrell and I, just as the morning was breaking. I put one man at the wheel, sending the other forward. To both I gave the order to watch for a passing English ship and to hail instantly. I told Sorrel: "That is bound to happen. I shall signal her to take you home; they will not refuse."

She asked, "And you?"

I said, "I will go on farther up the coast to the nearest port."

She said, "Well, well?"

I told her, "Sell the brig and go inland, always in-

land." I had thought for some time past of that journey inland. I remembered those tall still trees, and land—so much land beyond them. Some sort of country, some manner of grave.

It was not until the next day in the twilight we sighted a ship. An 'Indiaman making for England. She answered our signal, and to my delight, for my anxiety was still very great, hove to and lowered a boat.

Immediately the boat touched water, and I could see the glimmer of oars, I knew I had lost Sorrel. I knew this was the finish of my life. All along it had been futility. Futility of adventure, futility of endeavor, futility of romance. I stood looking at her. I stood staring at my lost dream. She turned and looked at me.

"Well?"

I muttered, "They are sending a boat."

She said, "Is that all you have to say?"

I whispered hopelessly, "What else?"

The flaming, dying sun and this great despair, the glory of one early star, and this loneliness.

I heard Sorrel ask suddenly, "How many hands would that Indiaman carry?"

I looked toward it stupidly, and with an effort measured it with my eye. "Say thirty, possibly more."

She persisted, "And how many are needed for the brig?"

I stared at her bewildered. She was looking at the oncoming boat; there seemed about her then a strange reflective air. I told her, "Why five would do in all."

She said softly. "Would they not lend you three?" She went on: "Could you not tell them something, win their sympathy? Such things do happen; ships have lent men."

I stammered: "But why? For what reason?"

She turned and looked at me; I think I had never seen her so beautiful as then. She said, "To help with the brig!"

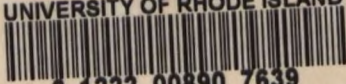
I shook my head. "I do not need help."

She sighed and even smiled. "Not for your way perhaps, but for mine; for England—"

I repeated dully, "England—"

And she caught me suddenly, with hands that clung as if they would never let me go. She cried with her face upturned to mine: "Ah! foolish, foolish! Home with you, my dear; home with you." Said it to me, to me! Clinging to me, crying with me, "My dear, my very dear."

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