

The Project Gutenberg eBook of The Seafarers, by John Bloundelle-Burton

This ebook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this ebook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you'll have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

Title: The Seafarers

Author: John Bloundelle-Burton

Release date: July 10, 2016 [EBook #52548]

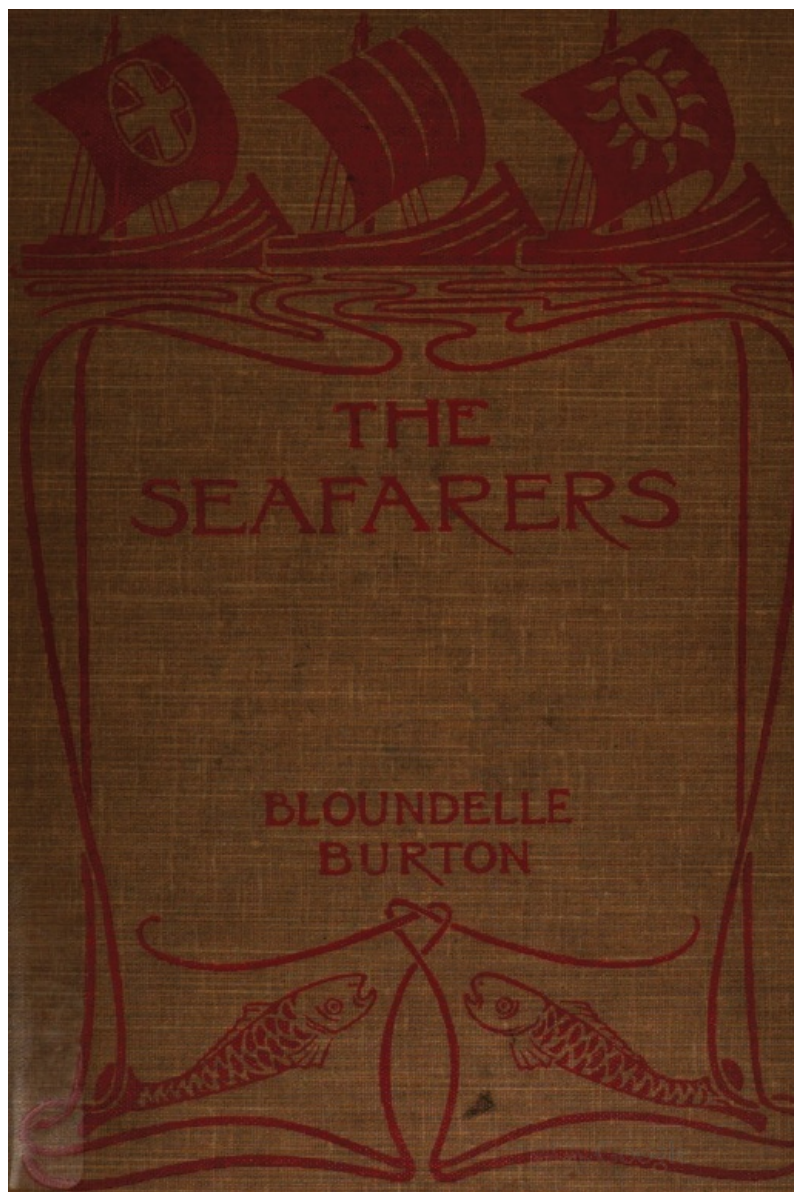
Language: English

Credits: Produced by Charles Bowen from page scans provided by Google Books (the University of California)

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SEAFARERS ***

Transcriber's Notes:

1. Page scan source:
<https://books.google.com/books?id=u3spAQAAIAAJ>
(the University of California)



THE SEAFARERS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

A BITTER HERITAGE.
FORTUNE'S MY FOE.
THE SCOURGE OF GOD.
ACROSS THE SALT SEAS.
THE CLASH OF ARMS.

DENOUNCED.
IN THE DAY OF ADVERSITY.
THE HISPANIOLA PLATE.
THE DESERT SHIP.
A GENTLEMAN ADVENTURER.
THE SILENT SHORE.
HIS OWN ENEMY.

THE SEAFARERS

BY

JOHN BLOUNDELLE-BURTON

AUTHOR OF 'THE CLASH OF ARMS'
'FORTUNE'S MY FOE,' 'ACROSS THE SALT SEAS'

LONDON
C. ARTHUR PEARSON LIMITED
HENRIETTA STREET W.C.
1900

TO

ALL OLD FRIENDS AND COMRADES

WHO HAVE BEEN, OR ARE STILL

SEAFARERS

EITHER IN THE ROYAL NAVY

OR OTHER BRANCHES OF THE SEA SERVICE

I INSCRIBE THIS BOOK

CONTENTS

CHAP.

1. ['Sweeter than Blue-Eyed Violets or the Damask Rose'](#)
2. [Stephen Charke](#)
3. ['Let those love now who never loved before'](#)
4. [Portsmouth *en fête*](#)
5. ['So farewell, Hope!'](#)
6. ['And bend the gallant Mast, my Boys'](#)
7. ['An Ocean Waif'](#)
8. ['His Name is--What?'](#)
9. ['Through the Salt Sea Foam'](#)
10. [The Growing Terror](#)
11. [The Terror increases](#)
12. [Stricken](#)
13. ['Spare her! Spare her!'](#)
14. [Struck down](#)
15. [A Light from the Past](#)
16. [Man overboard](#)
17. ['Farewell, my Rival'](#)
18. ['She will never know'](#)
19. ['I almost dreaded this Man once'](#)
20. ['I do believe you'](#)
21. [Washed ashore](#)
22. [A Sailor's Knife](#)
23. ['The Tiger did that'](#)
24. [Beaten! Defeated!](#)
25. ['I have loved my last'](#)
26. ['Here is my Journey's End'](#)

CHAPTER I

['SWEETER THAN BLUE-EYED VIOLETS OR THE DAMASK ROSE'](#)

That Bella Waldron should have felt sad, and her night's rest have been disturbed in consequence, was, in the circumstances, most natural. For one cannot suppose that any young girl leaves her home, her mother, and her country without much grief and perturbation; without tears and sorrow and heavy sighs, as well as tremendous fears that she may never return to, nor see, them again. And such is what Bella was about to do when this particular night should have come to an end: she was about to traverse not one ocean, but two; to pass from a life that, if not luxurious, was at least comfortable, to another which, if more brilliant, would undoubtedly be strange, and, consequently, not easily to be adopted at first. In fact, to go from one side of the world to the other.

Yet, all the same, it was singular that, between her intervals of weeping and sobbing, and when she had at last cried herself to sleep, she should have been tormented with such frightful

dreams as those which came to her. Dreams of horrors that in their weirdness became almost ludicrous, or would have been ludicrous to those who, knowing of them, did not happen to be experiencing them. Thus, the idea of a crocodile regarding one with a glittering eye from its ambush in the sand, seems for some reason, in our waking moments, to conjure up a comical sense of terror--perhaps because of the 'glittering eye'; yet there was nothing comical about it to the mind of Bella as she awoke with a shriek from her sleep after the vision of the creature had had momentary existence in the cells of her brain. And, even when she was thoroughly awakened and knew that she had only been suffering from a bad dream, she still shuddered at the recollection, and muttered, 'It appeared as if it was creeping towards me to seize me with its horrid jaws! Oh, it was dreadful!'

Then she slept again--only, however, to dream of other things. Of a desolate shore at first, with, upon it, a misty creature waving its hands mournfully above its head, those hands being enveloped in some gauzy material, so that the figure appeared more like a skirt-dancer than aught else; then, of two lions fighting savagely; and then of a vast black cave with an opening as high as St. Paul's and as wide as a railway terminus is long, against which, armed with a spear and protected with a buckler, she seemed to stand trembling. Trembling, too, because she could not see one yard into the deep and profound darkness before her, yet into which, as she peered furtively and with horror, she appeared to perceive things--forms half-animal and half-human--crawling, revolving, creeping about. Then, again, she awoke with a start.

But by now the room was light with the gray, mournful glimmer of the approaching dawn; so light that she could see her wicker-basket trunks in their American-cloth wrappers standing by the wall, with the lids open against it; soon, too, she heard the sparrows twittering outside, as well as other congenial suburban sounds, such as the newspaper boys shrieking hideously to one another, and the milkman uttering piercing yells; and--though it was her last day in England--she was glad to spring out of bed and know herself once more a unit in the actual world instead of a wanderer in a world of dreams.

'I wish,' the girl muttered to herself, standing by the window and drawing up the blind half-way, whereby she was enabled to see that the gray dawn of a May morning gave promise of a warm, fine day later on, 'that, if I were to have such bad dreams at all, I might have been spared them on the very day of my departure for the other side of the globe. I am not superstitious, yet, yet--well!--I shall think of this dream, I know, for many a day to come.' Then she slipped on her dressing-gown, thrust her pretty little white feet into some warm, felt bath-slippers, and, opening her door quietly, because it was still early and she did not wish to awaken those in the house who might be asleep, she went across the passage to her mother's room.

Yet, ere she did so, let us regard this young girl, whose story and adventures we are now to follow--this girl whose dreams of leering crocodiles and dark, mystic caves, with hideous creatures gyrating in them, will, as we shall see, be far outnumbered and outshone by the actual realities that she will experience in her passage across the world. For it had been resolved on by Fate, or Providence, or Destiny, or whatever one may term that power which controls our earthly existence, that to Bella Waldron were to come experiences, strange, horrible, and fantastic, such as the last decade of our expiring century rarely assaults men with, and women hardly ever. Standing there in the now clear light of the morning, her long dressing-gown enshrouding her tall, shapely, and *svelte* figure, and with her masses of hair hanging dishevelled--hair a warm brown with golden gleams in it, such as has the ripening corn--an observer would decide at once that she was beautiful. Beautiful, also, by the gift of clear, hazel-gray eyes--eyes that were pure and innocent in their glance; beautiful as well by her softly-rounded face, her rich red lips--the upper one divinely short--and also by her colouring. If, too, one applies to her the lines of that old poet dead and gone two hundred years ago, the words describing Gloriana:--

More fair than the red morning's dawn,
Sweeter than pearly dews that scent the lawn,
Than blue-eyed violets, or the damask rose
When in her hottest fragrancly she glows,

Bella Waldron may be considered as depicted.

'Mother,' she said, going in now to the room where the poor lady whom she addressed had herself passed a sad and tearful night, bemoaning the fact that soon--in a few hours--indeed now--because the fateful day had come--her child was to be torn from her. 'Oh, mother! It is to-day--to-day! Oh, my darling! how can I part from you?' And then, folding her mother in her arms while she sat on the bedside, the two women wept together.

'Yet,' said Mrs. Waldron, to whom advancing years brought the power of philosophic resignation, if not the thorough strength to overcome that which rendered her unhappy, 'yet, Bella, my dearest, it is so much for you. Such a position, such a future! Oh, think of it! A position you could scarcely ever have hoped to obtain. And the love, my child, the love! Think how Gilbert loves you and you love him. For you do love him, Bella. Of all men, he is the one for you.'

'With my whole heart and soul I love him!' her daughter answered. 'Mother, if I had never met him I do not believe I could have ever loved any other man. Ah, I am glad Juliet called Romeo the god of her idolatry! It has taught me how to think of Gilbert.'

'And the position, Bella. The position--think of that! In our circumstances, even though you come of a good stock and are descended from ladies and gentlemen on both sides from far-off years, you could never have hoped to make such a match.'

'The position is nothing to me, mother. I love Gilbert fondly. I long to be his wife. Why should I think of the position?'

'Every woman must think of it, child. When you are as old--and worn--as I am, you--you will teach your own children to think of it. It is everything to be the wife of a gentleman, better still the wife of a man of rank. Everything! Short of being the wife of a distinguished man, a man whose name is on everybody's tongue, there is no other position so good. And, even then, that distinguished man may not be a gentleman as well. That would be dreadful. Yet your husband will be both. Think, Bella! He is sure to become a nobleman, and he may become the most renowned admiral in the Navy.'

'You dear old mother! But I love Gilbert because he is Gilbert. Otherwise, neither the nobility which is certain, nor the renown which is prospective, would take me across the world to him. Do you think I would go to Bombay to marry the heir to a title or a possible admiral if I did not love him?'

'Heaven forbid!' Mrs. Waldron replied, as she sat up in her bed and smoothed her hair. 'Heaven forbid! Yet,' she murmured, perhaps a little weakly for a lady who had just delivered herself of such admirable sentiments, 'yet I do honestly think, darling, that the love you bear each other--yes! above all, the love--and the position--I must think of the position, Bella!--and the certainty of a brilliant future for you, reconcile me a little to parting with you. Some day, when you are a mother, you will understand me.'

'I understand you now, darling. Yet, yet--ah!' and now she sobbed on her mother's shoulder--'yet, to think of our being parted for so long--for three years! Gilbert must remain on the station for that length of time.' Now it is certain that Mrs. Waldron was sobbing too, yet, because there was something of the Spartan mother, something, too, of Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi, about her, she calmed her sobs. For she, too, had been ruthlessly torn by an all-conquering lover, who would take no denial, from her parents, arms. Yet that lover had had no such proud future to offer her as the Gilbert of whom they spoke had to offer his beloved Arabella; for her there had been nothing to flavour her existence except the glorious spice tasted by us all--of loving and being loved. And now--now that she was what she called old--which was not the case, since she was still short of her forty-fifth year--now she knew--and, knowing, said--that love accompanied by brilliant prospects and an assured future was the most satisfactory of all loves.

'Your father,' Mrs. Waldron said, 'remained on his station, the Pacific, for seven years, and we were separated all that time. He there, I here, in London. And in lodgings, Bella--oh those lodgings and that cooking!--you remember, darling? You must remember the lodgings and the cooking, child though you were. And he was not a future peer, though he did once think he might become an admiral.'

'Forgive me, mother,' Bella said, kissing her mother again and again. 'I will not repine any more. I ought not to do so, I know. For is not my Gilbert the handsomest, bravest sailor that ever wore the Queen's uniform? And it won't be so long after all. Only--only--I do wish there wasn't that awful journey. Oh if there were only a bridge!' and for the first time she smiled. 'Or a railway,' she added.

'I am sure, Bella,' her mother said, forgetting how she would feel that evening when her child was gone, and neither the bright voice nor brisk footsteps would be heard any more in the house, 'I am sure you cannot complain of the manner in which you are going out. The vessel may not be as comfortable as they say the great liners are, but at least your uncle is the captain, and it is his own ship. And that cabin he showed us yesterday, when we went down to Gravesend, is far better than anything you could get in any liner, even the best. I had one once, when I went out to join your father at Halifax, in which there was nowhere but the pockets of my clothes to keep things in, while the other lady above me could open the scuttle as she lay in her berth. And your cabin is as big as a dining-room, with a sofa----'

'You dear, darling mother!' Bella exclaimed. 'You are an angel to comfort me thus, when I know all the time that your heart is as sad as mine. Oh if we had not to part!' And again the two women hugged and kissed each other.

CHAPTER II

STEPHEN CHARKE

A year before this momentous day when Arabella Waldron was to set sail for India in her uncle's full-rigged ship, the *Emperor of the Moon*, there had come to her that supreme joy which is the most sweet experience of a young girl's life. The man she was madly in love with had asked her to be his wife, and, so far as it was possible to forecast the future, it seemed that before them both there stretched a long vista of happy years to be spent together, or as many years together as a sailor and his wife can pass during the greater part of their lives. Yet, who can foretell the future--even so much as what to-morrow may bring forth? To-day we are here, to-morrow we are gone. A bicycle accident has done for us, or we have caught a fever or pneumonia, and we are no more. How, then, was Bella to know that events would so shape themselves that, ere she had been a year engaged to her future husband, she would be on board the *Emperor of the Moon*, bound for the other side of the world, and that during her passage in the good old ship, named after an ancient play--a representation of which one of the late owners had witnessed in his boyhood--she would encounter such calamities and perils? But let us not anticipate. Rather, instead, let us describe who Bella was, and how she came to love and to be loved, to be wooed and won.

Our English girl! The girl fairly tall, and full to the brim with health; full, too, of a liking for all exercise which befits the dawning woman--for boating, riding, walking, cycling: not ashamed to acknowledge that she likes a good dance and that she has a good appetite for a ball supper; one who is, withal, not a fool! Where in all the world can you find anything better than that--better than the honest girls who have been our mothers, are our wives, and, please God, are what our daughters will be?

Such a one was Bella Waldron. She could take a scull--and pull it, too--as well as any of her sisters whom you shall meet 'twixt Richmond and Windsor; she could cycle thirty miles a day, eat a good dinner afterwards, and then go to a dance in the evening; and she thought nothing of walking from West Kensington to Piccadilly or Regent Street, with a glance at the Kensington High Street shops on her way!--especially when the winter remnant sales were on and advertised daily in glowing terms. Of riding she knew little, because horse-exercise is a more or less expensive luxury, and also because an income of £600 a year does not allow much in the way of luxuries, even when there are only two people in the family and two servants (with an odd boy) kept. And that sum represented Mrs. Waldron's income.

Bella's mother had been a Miss Pooley, who had married the late Commander Waldron (retired with the brevet rank of captain), and to this lady there remained only one near relative, besides Bella, at the time this veracious narrative opens. Now, this gentleman merits a slight description, not only because he plays a considerable part in those adventures and tribulations which, later on, befell the girl, but also because he occupied a position almost unique and, consequently, conspicuous in these modern days. Fifty--nay, thirty years ago, there would not have been anything peculiar in the career he followed; but now, with the twentieth century close upon us, that career was almost a singular one.

Captain Pooley was a sea captain--a mercantile sea captain--owning two ships of his own, and always in command of one of them. That which he now commanded was the very *Emperor of the Moon* of which you have already heard, and of which, if you follow this narrative, you will hear a great deal more; the other was a brig called *Sophy*, which will not figure at all in these pages. Now Captain Pooley, as he was called by everybody, though, of course, he had no right whatever to that distinctive appellation, had as a young man possessed an extraordinary love for the sea, so intense a love, indeed, that he, not being able to obtain a nomination for the Royal Navy, had induced his father to apprentice him to the merchant service. Later in life--one must be brief in these preliminary descriptions!--he had, after obtaining all his certificates, purchased one after the other, with some little money he had inherited, shares in first the one ship and then the second, and eventually, by aid of savings and successful trading, had become the entire owner of both. For the rest--to be again brief--he was a gentleman in manner and in feelings, while in his person he was a handsome, burly man, with the brightest of blue eyes, a vast shock of remarkably white hair above a good-looking, ruddy, tan-brown face; and was also the possessor of a smile which appeared more often than not upon his good-humoured countenance, and helped to make him welcome wherever he went, both at home and abroad. He was, it should be added, a married man, but childless, and it was not unusual for him to occasionally take his wife on the voyages he made for the purpose of transporting the goods which he sold in distant parts of the world, as well as for the purpose of purchasing other goods for sale in England. Otherwise, Mrs. Pooley remained at home in a pretty little villa at Blackheath, of which he owned a long lease.

It was a year before the great joy of Bella's life came to her that the 'captain,' returned from a voyage to Calcutta, and, as was always the case with him, he went to West Kensington to visit his sister and niece, accompanied by his wife. These visits were invariably paid, and also invariably returned by Mrs. and Miss Waldron, and were generally productive of a great deal of pleasure on either side. Captain Pooley--as we will continue to term him--was a kind-hearted, open-handed man, who loved his own kith and kin and cherished an old-fashioned notion--still in existence, Heaven be praised, amongst many members of various classes of society--that people should do as much as lay in their power to make their relatives happy. Wherefore, on this night, he said, as

he took the head of Mrs. Waldron's table--which she always insisted on his doing whenever he stayed with her--and while he carved a pair of most excellent fowls:

'So I think we shall have a good time of it all round, Mary,'--Mary being Mrs. Waldron's name. 'To-night we will go to the Lyceum, and to-morrow--well, to-morrow--we'll see. Then, next week, Southsea. Southsea's the place for us. Great doings there next week, Bell. The visit of the foreign fleet now there will beat everything that has gone before.'

'But the expense, George!' exclaimed his sister. 'The expense will be terrible. I saw in the paper that everything would be at famine price.'

The captain pooh-poohed this remark, however, saying that an old friend of his, who had retired from the Royal Navy and was now living at that lively watering-place, knew of a little furnished house which could be obtained reasonably if taken for the following week, as well as for the principal one. And he clinched the remark by saying, 'And I have told him to secure it.' There was therefore nothing further to be said on that score, Bella alone remarking that she had the best old uncle and aunt that ever lived.

'There will be,' he continued, putting a slice of the breast upon her plate, probably as a reward for her observation, 'plenty to amuse Bella. There is a garden-party at Whale Island; another given by the General; and a ball given by the Navy at the Town Hall. That's the place for you, Bella. If you don't find a husband there--and you a sailor's daughter, too--well!----'

But these remarks were hushed by his wife, who told him not to tease the child, and by the beautiful rose blush which promptly rushed to his niece's cheeks. Yet, all the same, Bella thought it very likely that she would have a good time of it.

They were playing *Madame Sans-Gêne* at the Lyceum that evening--though Pooley rather wished it had been something by Shakespeare--and on the road to the theatre in the cab he told them that he had taken another stall, to which he had invited a young friend of his whom he had run against in town a day or two ago.

'And a very good fellow, too,' he said, 'besides being a first-rate sailor. And he has had a pretty hard struggle of it, owing to his being cursed with a cross-grained old father, who seemed to imagine his son was only brought into the world that he might sit upon him in every way. All the same, though, Stephen Charke got to windward of him somehow.'

'Whoever is he, uncle?' Bella asked, interested in this story of the unknown person who was to make a fifth of their party; while her mother addressed a similar question to Mrs. Pooley.

'He is,' said the captain, 'a young man of about thirty, who once went to sea with me in the *Sophy*; the son of an old retired officer, who was years ago in a West Indian regiment. After petting and spoiling the boy, and--as Stephen Charke himself told me--almost treating him with deference because he happened to have been born his son, he afterwards endeavoured to exert a good deal of authority over him, which led to disagreeables. He wanted the lad to go in for the Army, and Stephen wanted to go to sea.'

'And got his way, apparently,' said Bella.

'He did,' her uncle replied, 'by absolutely running away to sea--just like a hero in a boy's book.'

'How lovely!' the girl exclaimed.

'Ha! humph!' said Pooley, rather doubtfully, he being a man who entirely disapproved of disobedience in any shape or form from a subordinate. 'Anyhow, his experiences weren't lovely at first. They don't take runaways in the best ships, you know. However, he stuck to it--he had burnt his boats as far as regards his father--and--well!--he holds a master's certificate now, and he's both a good sailor and a good fellow. He is in the Naval Reserve, too, and has had a year in a battleship.'

'And his father?' Mrs. Waldron asked. 'Are they reconciled?'

'The old man is dead, and Charke has three or four thousand or so, which makes him more or less independent. He's a queer fish in one way, and picks and chooses a good deal as to what kind of ship he will serve in. For instance, he won't go in a passenger steamer, because, he says, the mates are either treated with good-natured tolerance or snubbed by the travellers, and he aims at being an owner. However, as I said before, he's a good fellow.'

By this time the cab had forced its way along the Strand amidst hundreds of similar vehicles, many of which were disgorging their fares at the various other theatres, and at last, after receiving a gracious permission to pass from those autocratic masters of the public--the police stationed at the foot of Wellington Street--wrenched itself round and pulled up in its turn beneath the portico of the theatre.

'There's Charke!' said Pooley, while, as he spoke, a rather tall, good-looking man of dark complexion, who was irreproachably attired in evening dress, came up to them and was duly introduced.

To Bella, whose knowledge of the world--outside the quiet, refined circle in which she had moved--was small, this man came more as a surprise than anything else. She knew nothing of the sea, although she was the daughter of an officer who had been in the Royal Navy, and her idea of what a 'mate' was like was probably derived from those she had seen on the Jersey or Boulogne packet-boats, when her mother and she had occasionally visited these and similar places in the out-of-town season. Yet Stephen Charke (she supposed because he was a gentleman's son, and also because of that year in a battleship as an officer of the R.N.R.) was not at all what she had expected. His quiet, well-bred tones as he addressed her--with, in their deep, ocean-acquired strength, that subtle inflexion which marks the difference between the gentleman and the man who is simply not bad-mannered--took her entirely by surprise; while the courteous manner in which he spoke, accompanied by something that proclaimed indubitably his acquaintance, not only with the world, but its best customs, helped to contribute to that surprise. So that, as they proceeded towards their stalls, she found herself reflecting on what a small acquaintance she had with things in general outside her rather limited circle of vision.

CHAPTER III

'LET THOSE LOVE NOW WHO NEVER LOVED BEFORE'

The 'captain' led the way into the five stalls he had booked, followed, of course, by the elder ladies, and, as Stephen Charke naturally went last, it fell out that Bella and he sat by each other. And between the acts, the intervals of which were quite long enough for sustained conversation to take place, the girl had time to find her interest in him, as well as her surprise, considerably increased. She had perused in her time a few novels dealing with the sea, and, in these, the mates of ships of whom she had read had more or less served to confirm her opinion, already slightly formed from real life. But, when Charke began to talk to her about the actual source from which the play they were witnessing was drawn, she acknowledged to herself that, somehow, she must have conceived a wrong impression of those seafarers. Certainly he, she thought, could not be one of the creatures who cursed and abused the men if they objected to their food, and threatened next to put them in irons; nor did she remember that such individuals had ever been depicted in sea stories as knowing much about the Revolution in France and the vulgar amusements of Napoleon.

Then, during the next interval, he approached the subject of the forthcoming festivities at Portsmouth, to which Bella's uncle had told him he was going to take his relatives, and from that he glided off into the statement that he himself would be there.

'I am going down next Monday,' he said, 'to see one or two of my old mess-mates of the *Bacchus*--in which I served for a year in the Channel Squadron--and I fancy I shall be in at most of the functions. Have you ever been to a naval ball?'

Bella told him she never had been to one, her mother's intimacy with the Service having entirely ceased since Captain Waldron's death, and he then proceeded to give her an account of what these delightful functions were like. Indeed, so vividly did he portray them that Bella almost wished they were going on that very night to take part in one.

When the play was over, she--who acknowledged to herself that which probably no power on earth would have induced her to acknowledge so soon to any one else, namely, that Stephen Charke was an agreeable, if not a fascinating, companion--in company with the others prepared to return to West Kensington, bidding goodbye to him in the vestibule of the theatre.

'Where are you staying?' Mrs. Waldron asked him, as they stood on the steps waiting for their cab to make its appearance in turn. 'And are you in London for any time?'

Charke mentioned the name of a West End caravanserai, at which he had a room, as his abode for the next day or so, and by doing so he administered one more shock of surprise to the girl standing hooded and muffled by his side. For, again, in her ignorance, or perhaps owing to her reading of nautical novels, she had always thought of the officers of merchant vessels as living somewhere in the purlieus of Ratcliffe Highway when ashore, and rarely penetrating farther west than the city itself. It seemed, however, that either she had formed a totally erroneous impression of such people, or that the above sources of information must be wrong if all were really like Mr. Charke. But then, suddenly, there occurred to her mind the fact that her uncle had said this young officer was in possession of some few thousand pounds of his own--and this, probably, would explain why he was living in a comfortable manner when he was ashore.

'I am at home to my friends every other Friday,' Mrs. Waldron said, as now the cab had got to the portico, and a man was bawling out 'Mrs. Pooley's carriage' at the top of his voice--which

announcement, nevertheless, served the purpose required--'and the day after to-morrow happens to be one of those Fridays. If you care to call--though I know gentlemen despise such things--we shall be glad to see you.'

'I do not despise them,' Charke answered, 'and I shall be delighted to come.'

Then he bade them all good-night, saw the cab off, and strolled down to his hotel. In his innermost heart Charke did despise such things as 'at homes,' or 'tea fights,' as he termed them contemptuously to himself, yet, in common with a great many other men, he was willing enough to go to them when there was any attraction strong enough to draw him.

And he told himself that there was an attraction at Mrs. Waldron's such as he had never been subjected to before.

'What a lovely girl,' he thought to himself; 'what eyes and hair--and a nice girl, too! Now I begin to understand why other men curse the sea, and say they would rather earn their living on shore driving busses than following our calling. And, also, why they nail up photographs in their cabins and watch every chance of getting mails off from the shore. I suppose I should have understood it earlier if I had ever met a girl like this.'

He did call on the following Friday, after having passed the intervening two days in wandering about London; in going to a race meeting one day and a cricket match at the Oval the next; in trying a dinner at one foreign restaurant on the Wednesday, and another at a second foreign restaurant on Thursday; but all the time he felt restless and unsettled, and wished that four o'clock on Friday was at hand.

'This won't do,' he said to himself, before the cricket match on Thursday was half over, and while he sat baking in the sun that streamed down on to the Oval--which disturbed him not at all, and had no power to make him any browner--'this won't do. I must go to sea at once. By the time I have seen that girl again I shall be head over ears in love with her. And the interest on £4000 in India Stock--by Jove! it isn't quite £4000 since I've been loafing about on shore!--and a chief officer's pay won't keep a wife. Not such a wife as she would be, anyway.'

He did not know it--or, perhaps, he did know it and would not acknowledge it to himself--but he was very nearly head over ears in love with Bella Waldron already. And he had only seen her once--been by her side at a theatre for three hours--with three intervals of ten minutes in which to talk to her! Yet the girl's beauty, her gentle innocence, and above all, that trusting confidence with which she seemed to look out upon all that was passing before her, and to regard the world as what it appeared to be and to take it at its own valuation, had captured him. Still, he should have known--he must have known--that when a man who has never thought much of the women he has met heretofore, and has generally forgotten what their features were like by the next day, takes to lying awake for hours dreaming at last of one woman with whom he has by chance come into contact, he is as nearly in love with her as it is possible for him to be.

So, at least, those report who have been in love, and so it has been told to the writer of this narrative!

He made his way to Montmorency Road, West Kensington, exactly at four o'clock, and while he sat in the pretty drawing-room talking to Mrs. Waldron, who was alone at present--the appearance of Bella being promised by her mother in a few moments--he found himself wondering what the girl did with her life here. He had seen a bicycle in the passage as he was shown upstairs, so he supposed she rode that; while there were some photographs of rather good-looking men standing about on the semi-grand and on the plush-covered mantelshelf--which made him feel horribly annoyed, until Mrs. Waldron, seeing his glance fixed on them, informed him that they were mostly cousins who were out of the country, and that one or two of them happened to have succumbed to various climatic disorders abroad, for which catastrophes he did not seem to feel as sorry as he supposed he ought to do. Then Bella came in, looking radiantly beautiful in a summer dress (a description of which masculine ignorance renders impossible), and Stephen Charke was happy for ten minutes. For they all talked of the impending *fêtes* at Portsmouth in honour of the foreign fleet, and Charke found himself in an Elysium when Bella promised him--without the slightest self-consciousness or false shame--that she would undoubtedly have some dances reserved for him.

Yet, soon, other callers came in, and Stephen Charke found himself deprived of the pleasure of further conversation with Bella. An elderly dowager claimed her attention, and a middle-aged lady--of, as he considered, menacing aspect--regaled him with the evil doings of her domestic servants, a subject of about as much interest to this wanderer of the seas as that of embroidery or tatting would have been. An Irish Doctor of Divinity also disturbed his meditations on Bella's beauty by telling funny stories, the point of which the divine had forgotten until he refreshed his memory by reference to a little note-book in which he had them all written down, while a young militia subaltern who had failed for the Army--and seemed rather proud of it!--irritated him beyond endurance. Yet, even through this fatuous individual, there came something that was welcome to him, since he saw Bella regarding the youth with a look of scarcely veiled contempt, and he longed to tell the idiot that the only failure for which women have no pity in this world is that of the intellect.

'Goodbye,' he said to Bella, who accompanied him to the head of the stairs, after he had made his adieux to her mother. 'Goodbye. Next week--Portsmouth--and--my dances.'

'I shall not forget,' she said.

After which he wandered off by devious and intricate ways (which reminded him of some of the narrow passages he knew of between the islands in the China seas) and so arrived at the District Railway.

And all the time he was telling himself that he was a fool--an absolute fool. 'I have fallen in love with a girl I have only seen twice,' he meditated, as the train ran through the sulphurous regions underground, and he endeavoured to protect his lungs by smoking cigarette after cigarette; 'a girl who is not, and never can be, anything to me. She will make a good match some day; she must make a good match--girls of her position and looks always do; and, a year or two hence, I shall luff into some unearthly harbour abroad, and run against Pooley, who will tell me that she has done so.'

Yet, all the same, he took comfort from remembering that he had not seen anybody at Mrs. Waldron's 'afternoon' who was likely to be the individual to carry her off.

But, in spite of this soothing reflection, he braced himself to a stern resolution: he determined that, as already in his life he had triumphed over other things, so he would triumph now. He would triumph over this swift-flowering and still growing love; conquer it by absence from the object which inspired it; trample it down till there was nothing left of life in it.

'I have no money to keep a wife,' he thought, as he walked up from Charing Cross Station to his hotel; 'certainly no money to keep such a wife as she would be. And, even if I had, it is not likely that she would marry me; "a common mate," as I have heard ourselves called. Portsmouth shall end it,' he concluded. 'I'll have one good week there, and then to sea again on a long cruise. That ought to do it! I'll go down to the docks to-morrow and see what's open.'

Wherefore, full of this determinate resolution to drive from out of him the frenzy which had taken possession of his heart and mind, he went to the hotel and read in his bedroom for an hour or so, during all of which time Bella Waldron's face was looking out at him from the pages of the *Navy and Army Illustrated*, and was always before him until he went forth to try still another foreign restaurant. Yet she was there too, and her pure, innocent eyes were gazing at him across the imitation flowers and the red candle-shades in the middle of the table; and so, also, they were in the stalls of the Empire, until he fell asleep in his seat. Nor was she absent from his mind during the long hours of the night.

CHAPTER IV

PORTSMOUTH EN FÊTE

The lunch at Whale Island was over, and there was a slight breathing-space ere the garden-party, which followed it, began. Meanwhile, from Southsea pier, from down by the pontoon at the foot of the old Hard, and over from Gosport, picket-boats, steam pinnaces, and launches--all belonging to Her Majesty's ships lying out at Spithead--were coming fast, as well as shore boats and numerous other craft that blackened the waters. And they bore in them a gaily-dressed crowd of men and women, the ladies being adorned in all those beauteous garments which they know so well how to assume on such an occasion; while, among the gentlemen, frock-coats, tall hats, and white waistcoats, as well as full dress, or 'No. 1' uniform, were the order of the day. For all these ship's-boats, after putting off from the battleships and cruisers to which they belonged, had, by order of the Vice-Admiral commanding the Channel Squadron, called at the above-named places to fetch off the visitors to the Whale Island festivities.

Stephen Charke, in the uniform of the R.N.R., came in the picket-boat of the *Bacchus*, wherein he had been lunching with the wardroom officers, and as she went alongside of Southsea pier, and afterwards at the Old Town pier, he had eagerly scanned the ladies who were waiting to be taken off. He was not, however, particularly disappointed or cast down at not seeing the one girl he was looking out for at either of them, since, in the continual departure of similar boats, and the running backwards and forwards of these craft between Whale Island and the landing-stages, it was, of course, hardly to be supposed that she would happen upon the particular boat in which he was.

He saw her, however, directly he, with his companions, had made their way to the lawn on which the wife of the Port-Admiral was receiving her guests, and--in so seeing her--he recognised instantly that he was not going to enjoy his afternoon as much as he had hoped to do.

'Who's that?' he asked of the Staff-Commander of the *Bacchus*, with whom he happened to be walking at the moment. 'I mean that flag-lieutenant talking to the young lady in the white dress?'

'That?' replied his companion, regarding the young officer indicated. 'Oh, that's Gilbert Bampfyld, flag-lieutenant to the Rear-Admiral. He's a good chap; I'll introduce you later. A lucky fellow, too. He's heir to his uncle, Lord D'Abernon. He's all right,' he concluded inconsequently.

'I know the young lady,' Stephen said. 'I've been at sea with her uncle.'

'Good-looking,' said the Staff-Commander, who was a single man. 'Fine girl, too. I hope she's coming to the ball.'

'She is,' Charke replied, and then stood observing her companion from the little group of which they now formed part.

Certainly the young officer was 'all right,' if good looks and a manly figure can entitle any one to that qualification. He was undoubtedly handsome, with the manliness which women are stated (by authorities on such matters) to admire: his bright eyes and good complexion, as well as his clear-cut, regular features, leaving little else to desire. He was also fairly tall, while, if anything were required to set off his appearance, it was furnished by his full-dress and his flag-lieutenant's aiguillettes. He was talking now in an animated way, as Charke could see easily enough from where he stood by the refreshment tent; and it was not possible for him to doubt that he was making himself very interesting to Bella.

For a moment, Stephen stood hesitating as to whether he should go up and present himself to the girl who had never been out of his thoughts since he said 'goodbye' to her in West Kensington; then, while he still debated the matter in his mind, Bella saw him and smiled and nodded pleasantly, while she looked--as he thought--as though she expected he should come up to her. Which of course decided him.

There was no affectation in the manner wherewith Bella greeted him; in truth, she was glad to see him and, honestly, as she did everything else, she said so.

'I have been looking for you for the last half-hour,' she remarked, as he reached her side, 'and wondering if you were coming or not'; after which she introduced Stephen Charke and Gilbert Bampfyld to each other. Then, some other officers coming up at this moment, more introductions took place, while Bampfyld said that he must move off.

'I have escaped from my Admiral for a few moments,' he said, while he added with a laugh: 'I am not quite sure, however, that he is not congratulating himself on having escaped from me. I hope, Miss Waldron,' he added, 'that you have an invitation for the ball?'

'Yes,' Bella said; and she smiled at Lieutenant Bampfyld's request that he might not be forgotten on that occasion, though she did not say positively whether that calamity would occur or not. Then, when he had moved on to join the distinguished officer to whom it was his duty to be attached almost as tightly as a limpet to a rock, she said to Charke, 'Come, now, and see mamma. She is in the shade behind the tent, and she has found an old friend of father's.'

But it was so evident that Mrs. Waldron was thoroughly enjoying herself with that old friend, who was a retired post-captain (she was, indeed, at the moment of their arrival engaged in reminiscences of the North American and West Indian stations), that they strolled away together, and, finding soon another shady seat, sat down and passed an agreeable hour or so. Wherefore, as you may thus see, Stephen Charke did spend a happy afternoon, notwithstanding that first apparition of the flag-lieutenant in converse with the girl who was now never out of his thoughts. Indeed, it would have been to him a perfect afternoon, had he not more than once seen Bampfyld (who again appeared to have escaped from his Admiral!) roaming about the place with a somewhat disconsolate, as well as penetrating, look upon his face; which look Charke construed into meaning that the other was seeking for the girl of whom he himself had now obtained temporary possession. However, even so, he did not think it necessary to call Bella's attention to the fact. But we must not tarry over these soft summer beguilements to which the old naval capital and all in her had given themselves up. There lie other matters before us--matters which, when they afterwards occurred, caused three people now partaking of these enjoyments to, perhaps, cast back their memories--memories that were not untinged by regret. Suffice it, therefore, that we hurry on, and passing over another garden-party which took place at the Military Commandant's, and an 'at home' given on board the foreign visitors, flagship, as well as entertainments at which only the male sex were present, we come to the Naval ball at the Town Hall.

That was a great night, a night on which, if one may judge by subsequent events, many loving hearts were made happy; on which, too, some saw the dawn of the first promise of future happiness--and one man, at least, was made unhappy. It was a great night! A night no more forgotten by three people in the days that followed it than was the garden-party which preceded it by a day or so.

The First Lord of the Admiralty led off the quadrille with the wife of the Commander-in-Chief, while the Prince who was in command of the foreign fleet danced with the First Lord's wife; there being in that set, round which the other guests formed a vast circle, the most prominent

individuals then present in Portsmouth. And Bella, standing close by with her hand upon the arm of Stephen Charke, while they waited for the first dance in which all the guests could participate, felt that, at last, she knew what a ball was.

'It isn't quite like a State Ball,' whispered Lieutenant Bampfylde to them as he passed by with his Admiral, he being qualified to give such information in consequence of his duties as flag-lieutenant having often given him the opportunity of attending those great functions, 'but it is much prettier.' Then he disappeared for a time.

'It could scarcely be prettier than it is,' Bella said to Charke. 'How has the room been made so beautiful?'

'The men of the *Vernon* have done it all,' her companion answered; 'they are good at that sort of thing.'

As, indeed, they seemed to be, judging by the effect they had produced. Trophies of arms, flags, devices, life-buoys white as snow, with the names of vessels belonging both to the visitors and ourselves painted in gold upon them, decorated the vast room; while, from the dockyard, had been unearthed old armour and weapons, such as, in these present days, are forgotten. Also the colour lent by various uniforms, naval, military, and marine, as well as by flowers and the bouquets carried by ladies, added to the brilliant scene--while the sombre black of civilians helped to give a contrast to the bright hues. For civilians were not forgotten: Admiralty officials, private residents, special correspondents--with a wary eye on their watches, so that they might be able to rush over to the Post-office with their last messages for the great London and provincial papers--were all there.

'Come,' said Stephen Charke, as the band of the Royal Marines struck up the first waltz, 'come, Miss Waldron; it is our turn now.'

And for ten minutes he realised what happiness meant.

That he would have to resign her for the greater part of the evening, he knew very well--her programme was already full!--his name appearing three times on it, and Lieutenant Bampfylde's also three times--yet, later, he did so none the less willingly for that knowledge. How could he? He loved the girl with his whole heart and soul--madly! 'I shall love her always, until I die,' he muttered to himself as he stood by, seeking no other partner and watching her dancing now with the flag-lieutenant. Then, next, he saw her dancing with the flag-lieutenant of the other Admiral--though that did not seem to him to be so disturbing a matter. 'Till I die!' he repeated again; and then once more called himself a fool.

His second dance with her arrived, and once more he was in his seventh heaven; for the moment he was again supremely happy.

'I hope I may have the pleasure of taking you in to supper,' he almost whispered in her ear as they paused for a moment for breath, and it seemed as if the light of his enjoyment--for that evening at least--had been suddenly extinguished when she, raising those sweet, clear eyes to his, exclaimed:

'Oh, I am so sorry! But I have promised Lieutenant Bampfylde that he shall do so.'

For the remainder of the ball Charke did not let a single dance pass by without taking part in it, and allowed his friends to introduce him right and left to any lady who happened to require a partner, though reserving, of course, the one for which he was engaged to Bella at what would be almost the end of the evening. In fact, as his friend the Staff-Commander said, 'he let himself go pretty considerably,' and he so far exemplified that gentleman's remark that he took in to supper one of the plainest of those middle-aged ladies who happened to be gracing the ball with their presence.

Yet this lady found nothing whatever to complain of to herself (to her friends she would have uttered no complaint of her cavalier, even though he had been as stupid as an owl and as dumb as a stone, she being a wary old campaigner), but, instead, thought him a charming companion. Perhaps, too, she had good reason to do so, since, from the moment he conducted her across the temporarily constructed bridge which led from the Town Hall proper to the supper tent erected in a vacant plot of ground, his conversation was full of smart sayings and pleasant, though occasionally sub-acid, remarks on things in general. Yet, naturally, it was impossible that she should know that the undoubtedly bright and piquant conversation with which he entertained her was partly produced by his bitterness at seeing Gilbert Bampfylde and Bella enjoying themselves thoroughly at a table *à-deux* close by where he and his partner were seated, and partly by his stoical determination to 'let things go.' And by, also, another determination at which he had arrived--namely, to go to sea again at the very first moment he could find a ship.

CHAPTER V

'SO FAREWELL, HOPE!'

Nine months had passed since the entertainment of the foreign fleet at Portsmouth--months that had been pregnant with events concerning the three persons with whom this narrative deals; and Bella sat now, at the end of a dull March afternoon, in the pretty drawing-room in West Kensington. She sat there meditating deeply, since she happened to be alone at the moment, owing to Mrs. Waldron having gone out to pay several calls.

Of all who had been at those entertainments, of all in the party which, in the preceding June, had gathered together at Portsmouth, the three ladies of the family, Mrs. Waldron, Mrs. Pooley, and Bella, were alone in England; the three men--the three sailors--were all gone to different parts of the world. Captain Pooley had sailed with his vessel to Australia; Stephen Charke had gone to China as first officer of a large vessel; and Gilbert Bampfyld, who, in consequence of the Rear-Admiral's retirement, no longer wore the aiguillettes of a flag-lieutenant, had been appointed to the *Briseus*, on the East Indian station.

And Bella, sitting now in her arm-chair in front of the drawing-room fire, with a letter lying open on her lap before her, was thinking of the writer of that letter, as well as of all that it contained. If one glances at it as it lies there before her, much may be gleaned of what has happened in those nine months; while perhaps, also, some idea, some light, may be gained of that which is to come.

'MY DARLING,' it commenced (and possibly the writer, far away, may have hoped that, as he wrote those words, they would be kissed as often by the person to whom they were addressed as he fondly desired), 'MY DARLING--Your letter came to me to-day, and I must write back to you at once--this very instant--not only because I want to put all my thoughts on paper, but also because I can thus catch the P. and O. mail. How good! how good you are! While, also, I do not forget how good your mother is. I know I ought not--at least I suppose I ought not--to ask you to do such a thing as come out to me, and I can assure you I hesitated for weeks before daring to do so. Yet, when I reflected that, if you could not bring yourself to come, as well as induce your mother to give her consent to your coming, we could not possibly be married for three years, I could not hesitate any longer. And now--now--oh, Bella, my darling! I could dance for joy if my cabin was big enough to allow of such a thing--you are coming! You will come! How happy we shall be! I can think of nothing else--nothing. You don't know how I feel, and it's useless for me to try to tell you....'

No more need be read of this letter, however, and, since the reader will shortly be informed of what led to it, nothing more need be said than that, after a good deal of explanation as to how the young lady to whom it was addressed was to make her plans for reaching Bombay, it was signed 'Gilbert Bampfyld.'

So that one sees now what had been the outcome of that week of delight at Portsmouth during the last summer; one understands all that had been the result of those garden-parties and that ball.

They--the festivities--were followed by a renewal of the acquaintanceship between Mrs. Waldron and her daughter and Gilbert Bampfyld, as, indeed, the latter had quite made up his mind should be the case, and as--since the truth must always be spoken--Bella had hoped would happen. They were followed, that is to say, directly the naval man[oe]uvres were over, for which important function both divisions of the Channel Squadron were of course utilised, while not a week had elapsed from the time of the return of the ships to their stations before Gilbert Bampfyld presented himself in Montmorency Road. And that presentation of himself at this suburban retreat was, it is surely unnecessary to say, succeeded by many other things, all showing what was impending and what actually happened later on. Gilbert Bampfyld told Bella that he loved her and wanted her for his wife, and--well, one can imagine the rest. What was there to stand between those loving hearts? What? Nothing to impede their engagement, nothing that need have impeded their immediate marriage, except the fact that Bella's maiden modesty could never have been brought to consent to a union so hurriedly entered into as would have been necessary, had she agreed to become Gilbert's wife ere he set out for Bombay to join the *Briseus*, to which he was now appointed.

One regrets, however, when describing such soft and glowing incidents as these, that space is so circumscribed (owing to the canvas having to be filled with larger events now looming near) as to leave no room for more minute description of this love idyl. It would have been pleasant to have dwelt upon Bella's ecstatic joy at having been asked to be the wife of the one man--the first man--whose love she had ever desired (ah, that is it--to be the first man or the first girl who has ever touched the heart of him or her we worship); only it must not be--the reader's own

imagination shall be asked to fill the missing description. Let those, therefore, who remember the earliest whispered word of love they ever spoke or had spoken to them; who recall still the first kiss they ever gave or took; and those who can remember, also, all the joy that came to them when first they loved and knew themselves beloved, fill the hiatus. That will suffice.

'We shall be so happy, dearest,' Gilbert said, when all preliminaries had been arranged in so far as their engagement was concerned, and when he did not know at the time that he was about to be sent on foreign service, but hoped that he would either be allowed to remain in the Channel Squadron or be transferred to the Training Squadron, or, at worst, appointed to the Mediterranean. 'We shall be so happy, darling. I hoped from the first to win you--though--though sometimes I feared there might be some one else.'

'There could never have been any one else. Never, after I had once met you,' she murmured. 'Oh, Gilbert!' and then she, too, said she was so happy. Yet a moment later she whispered: 'But, somehow, it seems too good to be true. All has come so easily in the way that I--well, as we--desired, that sometimes I think there may be--that something may arise to--to----'

'What--prevent our marriage? Nothing can do that. Nothing could have done that--nothing!'

'Suppose your uncle, Lord D'Abernon, had objected?' she said, remembering that she had heard how this nobleman was not always given to making things quite as easy and comfortable to those by whom he was surrounded as was considered desirable. 'Suppose that had happened?'

'Oh, he's all right,' Gilbert replied. 'He expected his opinion to be asked and his consent obtained, and all that sort of thing, but, outside that, he's satisfied. And if he wasn't, it wouldn't have made any difference to me--after I had once seen you.' For which remark he was rewarded with one of those chaste salutes which Bella had learnt by now to bestow without too much diffidence. As regards Mrs. Waldron--well, she was a mother, and it was not to be supposed that such a distinguished match as Bella was about to make could be aught but satisfactory to her; while Captain Pooley, who had not yet departed with the *Emperor of the Moon* for Australia, told his niece that she was a lucky girl. He also informed Gilbert that, as he was a childless man, Bella would eventually fall heiress to anything he and his wife might leave behind them. Matters looked, therefore, as though they would all go merry as the proverbial marriage bell. All, as the old romancists used to say, was very well.

Then fell the first blow--the one that was to separate those two fond hearts. Gilbert was suddenly appointed to the *Briseus* and ordered to proceed to Bombay to join her at once, and a fortnight later he was gone, and poor Bella was left behind lamenting.

She was sitting, lamenting still, before her fire on this March day, with this newly-arrived letter on her lap--in solemn truth, she had been lamenting his departure ever since it had taken place--when, suddenly, there broke in upon her ears the sound of a visitor's knock below. Then, ere she could distinguish whose voice was addressing the servant who had answered the door, she heard a manly footstep on the stairs, and, a moment later, the maidservant announced: 'Mr. Charke.' Mr. Charke! the man whose memory had almost faded from her mind--as she had reproached herself for more than once, when it did happen to recur to her--the man whom she had learnt to like so much during all that happy time last year. Now, as she gazed on him, and noticed how brown he was as he came forward--more deeply browned, indeed, than she had thought it possible for him, who was already so tanned and sunburnt, to be--and noticed, too, the strong, self-reliant look on his face, she reproached herself again. She acknowledged, also, that she had liked him so much that even her new-found happiness ought not to have driven all recollection of him entirely from her mind.

Then she greeted him warmly, saying all the pleasant little words of welcome that a woman whose heart goes in unison with her good breeding knows how to say; and made him welcome. Yet, as she did so, she observed that he was graver, more sad, it seemed to her, than she had ever remarked before.

'You are not ill?' she asked, as this fact became more and more apparent to her. 'Surely, you, a sailor, have not come back from the sea unwell? At least I hope not.'

'No,' he said, 'no. Nor, I hope, do I seem so. Do you know that, besides any desire to call and see you, I came for another purpose?' and now his eyes rested on her with so strange a light--so mournful, deep a light--that in a moment her woman's instinct told her what he meant as plainly as though his voice had done so.

Like a flash of lightning, that instinct revealed to her the fact that this man loved her; that, from the moment they had parted, months ago, she had never been absent from his mind. She knew it; she was certain she was right--she could not be deceived! Then to herself she said: 'Heaven help him--Heaven prevent him from telling me so.'

But aloud, her heart full of pity, she said: 'Indeed,' and smiled bravely on him while she spoke. 'Indeed, what was that purpose?'

'To congratulate you. To----'

'Congratulate me!'

'Yes. I met the *Emperor of the Moon* at Capetown. We were both homeward bound. And--and--your uncle told me the news. I offer my congratulations now.' Yet, as he said the words, she saw that his face was turned a little aside so that she could not perceive his eyes. Congratulations! Well, they might be sincere in so far as that, because he loved her, he wished her well and desired that she should be happy, but--but--otherwise--no! it was not to be thought upon.

As he said the words: 'I congratulate you,' he followed an old custom--one more foreign than English--and held out his hand, taking hers. And he kept it, too, fast in his own, while he said in the voice that his struggles with the elements had made so deep and sonorous:

'Yes, I congratulate you. I must do that. To--to--see you happy--to know you are so, is all that I have--all--I hope for now. Yet there is no treachery to him in what I say. Heaven help me! I mean none--but--but--I--from the first--I have lo----'

'No, no,' she murmured, striving to withdraw her hand, yet not doing so angrily. 'No, no. Don't say it, Mr. Charke. Don't, pray don't.' And, now, neither could he see her eyes nor her averted face. 'Don't say it. You do not desire to make me unhappy?' she murmured.

'Never, as God hears me. But--I have said it. I had to say it. Goodbye.'

'Goodbye,' she said--and then, as he neared the door, she turned once and looked at him with eyes that were full of intense pity and compassion.

CHAPTER VI

'AND BEND THE GALLANT MAST, MY BOYS'

Events are now drawing near to that night when Bella was to have those distressing dreams which have been mentioned at the opening of this narrative; all was arranged for her departure to Bombay. A little more, and she will be on her way to India and to wedlock.

Yet all had not been quite easy and smooth in the settlement of affairs. At first, Mrs. Waldron, good, loving mother though she was, and fully cognisant of the facts--namely, that Bella loved Lieutenant Bampfyld madly and would be an unhappy woman if she did not become his wife long ere three years had passed, and that the match which her child was about to make was undoubtedly a brilliant one--refused to hear of such a thing as that she should go out to him.

'If you are worth having,' she said, when first the proposal was submitted to her, 'you are surely worth coming for.' And, since this was a truism, it was hardly to be gainsaid. Yet, as we know by now, she had been won over by her daughter's pleadings and entreaties; by, too, the plain and undeniable fact that there was not the slightest possibility of Lieutenant Bampfyld being able to come home to marry her, or to return to England in any way--short of being invalided--until the *Briseus* herself returned.

Then, no sooner had this difficulty been surmounted than another reared its head before mother and daughter. How was she to go out to Bombay alone and unprotected? A young married woman, who had to proceed to India to join her husband, might very well undertake such a journey, but not a young single woman such as Bella was, while for chaperon or protectress there was no one forthcoming. At first, it is true, Mrs. Waldron had meditated accompanying Bella herself (she being an old sailor, to whom long sea voyages were little more than railway journeys are to some more stay-at-home ladies); only, down in the depths of her nature, which was an extremely refined one, there was some voice whispering to her that it would be indelicate to thus bring her daughter out in pursuit of her affianced husband. It is true, however, that authorities on social etiquette who have since been consulted have averred that this was a false feeling which was in possession of Mrs. Waldron's mind; but be that as it may, it existed. Then, too, she still regarded the matter of her child going to her future husband, instead of that husband coming to fetch her, as one of particular delicacy; one of such nicety as to permit of no elaboration; and she resolved that, come what might--even though she should have to purchase, or hire rather, the services of an elderly and austere travelling companion--she must not herself accompany Bella.

'Heaven knows what is to be done,' she said to her daughter, as they discussed the important point, 'but I suppose it will come to that'; the 'that' meaning the hired chaperon. Then she sighed a little, remembering how the late Captain Waldron had encompassed thousands of miles in a voyage which he made from the Antipodes to espouse her.

Yet, ere many days had passed, the clouds of obstruction were suddenly removed in a manner which seemed almost--as the fond mother stated--providential. Captain Pooley's ship had followed

home, after a week or so of interval, that in which Stephen Charke had returned to England, and its arrival was soon succeeded by his own in Montmorency Road.

'Going out to him to be married!' he exclaimed, after his sister--who happened to be alone at the time of his visit--had made him acquainted with what she had given her consent to some two or three months before, on Gilbert's application backed up by Bella's supplications, and which consent she had moaned over inwardly ever since she had so given it. 'Going out to be married, eh? Why, she must want a husband badly!' Yet, because he knew well enough the customs of Her Majesty's service and the impossibility which prevailed in that service of an officer coming home to marry his bride, he did not repeat her words, 'If she is worth having, she is worth coming for.'

'So other people have thought, if they have not openly said so,' Mrs. Waldron replied. 'I am sure they must have thought so. Yet,' she went on, with determination, 'I have agreed to it, and I cannot retract my word. It is given, and must be kept. No, it is not that which troubles me.'

'What, then?'

'Why, the getting out. How is the child to go alone, in a great liner, with two or three hundred passengers, all the way to Bombay? How?' she repeated.

'Bombay, eh? Bombay. Oh, well, if that's her destination, she can go comfortably enough. There need be no trouble about that. Only she will be more than double the time the P. and O., or any other line, would take to carry her.'

'What do you mean, George?'

'Why,' he said, 'I happen to be taking the old *Emperor* to Bombay next month with a general cargo--calling at the Cape on the way. She can go with me, and welcome. There's a cabin fit for a duchess which she can have.'

* * * * *

It was a cabin fit for a duchess, as Bella and her mother acknowledged when, a fortnight later, they went down to Gravesend to inspect the *Emperor of the Moon*, and after it had been decided in solemn family conclave that, by this ship, the former should make the voyage to India. And it was more than likely that the girl would make it under particularly pleasant circumstances, since this was one of those occasions on which Mrs. Pooley had decided to accompany her husband, she not having felt very well during the past winter. At present, the cabin was empty and denuded of everything, Pooley having decided to have it refurnished; but when he told them how that furniture would be arranged in the great roomy place, which would have been dignified as a 'state-room' in one of the old clippers, Bella said again, as she had said so often before, that 'he was the best old uncle in the world.'

Now the *Emperor of the Moon* was a smart, though old-fashioned, full-rigged ship of about six hundred tons, her lines being perfect, while leaving her full of room inside. Her saloon was a comfortable one, well furnished with plush-covered chairs and benches--the covering being quite new; a piano--also looking new--was lashed to the stem of the mizzen-mast, while there were swinging vases, in which, no doubt, fresh ferns and flowers would be placed later. On deck she was very clean and white, with much brass and everything neat and shipshape, while the seaman who should regard her bows and stern would at once acknowledge that she left little to desire, old as she was. For, in the days when she was laid, they built ships with a view to both sea qualities and comfort, and the *Emperor of the Moon* lacked neither. Her sleeping-cabins were bedrooms, her saloon was a dining-room as good as you would find in a fifty-pound-a-year suburban residence, and her masts would have done credit to one of Her Majesty's earlier ships.

Altogether, Bella was pleased with everything, especially with her cabin, which was on the port side of the saloon, and she was, besides, pleasantly excited at the idea of so long a sailing voyage.

'I know,' she said to her uncle, 'that we shall have a delightful time of it, and for companionship I shall have you and auntie. That's enough.'

'You will have some one else, too,' Pooley said, with a smile; 'you know I have two officers. Come--and again he smiled--it is our "lay days,"' by which he meant that they were shipping their cargo. 'Come, I will introduce them to you.' Then he led the way up the companion to the deck.

They met one of these officers, the second mate, a young man whom Pooley introduced as Mr. Fagg, and then, while they were all talking together, Bella heard a deep, low voice behind her say: 'How do you do, Miss Waldron?' A voice that caused her to start as she turned round to find herself face to face with Stephen Charke.

'You!' she exclaimed involuntarily. 'You! Are you going on this voyage?'

'I am first officer,' he said. 'I wanted a berth, and Captain Pooley has given me one.' And amidst her uncle's joyous laughter and his remark that he knew this would be a pleasant surprise for Bella, and while, too, Mrs. Waldron said that she was delighted to think he would be in the

ship to look after her daughter, that daughter had time to think herself--to reflect.

In her heart, she would far rather that Charke had not been here; while she wondered, too, how he could have brought himself to accept his present position, knowing, as he must have known, that she was going in the ship.

'It is so vain, so useless,' she thought; 'and can only lead to discomfort. We shall both feel embarrassed all the way. Oh, I wish he were not coming!' Then, although she pitied him, and although she had always liked him, she resolved that, through the whole of the time they were together in the ship, she would see as little of Stephen Charke as possible.

'You do not object to my presence, I hope?' he said a moment later, as they both stood by the capstan alone--Pooley and his wife and sister having moved off forward. 'I should be sorry to think that my being here was disagreeable to you. I have to earn my living, you know.'

'What right could I have to object, Mr. Charke?'

'Perhaps you think I have behaved indiscreetly?'

For a moment she let her eyes fall on him and rest upon his own; then she said: 'I will not give any opinion. You have to earn your living, as you say; while as for me--well, you know what I am going to India for.'

'Yes,' he answered. 'I do know.' After which he added: 'Do not be under any wrong impression. I shall not annoy you. I am the chief officer of this ship and you are a passenger. That is, I understand, how the voyage is to be made?'

'If you please,' Bella replied very softly, and the tones of her voice might well have brought some comfort to him, if anything short of the possession of her love could have done so.

A fortnight or three weeks later the pilot had left the *Emperor of the Moon*, the lee main braces were manned, the ship was lying over under her canvas, the wind was well astern. Bella was on her way to India and her lover!

Let us pass over this parting between mother and child, the fond embraces, the tears and sobs which accompanied that parting following after the dawn when we first made the girl's acquaintance, and following, too, that night of unrest and disturbing dreams. No description of such partings is necessary; many of us, young and old, men and women, have had to make them; to part from the loved, gray-haired mother who has sobbed on our breast ere we went forth to find our livelihood, if not our fortune, in a strange world; many of us have had to let the child of our longings and our hopes and prayers go forth from us who have sheltered and nurtured it--from us who have perhaps prayed God night and day that, in His mercy, it might never leave our side. We go away ourselves because we must; also they go from us because they must; and there is nothing but the same hope left in all our hearts--the hope that we shall not be forgotten--that, as the years roll by, those we have left behind will keep a warm spot for us in their memory, or that those who have left us behind will sometimes turn their thoughts back longingly to us in our desolation. It has to be, and it has to be borne; alas, that parting is the penalty we all have to pay for having ever been permitted to be together.

And, so, across the seas, the stout old *Emperor of the Moon* went; buffeting with the Channel, throwing aside the rough waves with her forefoot as though she despised them, sinking England and home behind her with every plunge she made.

And at the moment that she was leaving the Lizard far away astern of her, and was running well out into the Atlantic, a telegram was delivered in Montmorency Road addressed to Bella, which was opened by her mother. A telegram signed 'Gilbert,' which ran: 'Don't start. *Briseus* appointed to East Coast Africa, slaver catching.' A telegram that had come three days too late! A telegram that was re-forwarded to Capetown, where it lay for forty-seven days awaiting the arrival of the *Emperor of the Moon*, and, then,--was forgotten!

CHAPTER VII

'AN OCEAN WAIF'

From the time the men had sheeted home the topsails as the *Emperor of the Moon* got under way until now when, having left the Cape of Good Hope behind her, she was travelling through the water at a very fair speed and with her head set due north, scarcely anything had occurred much worthy of note. Soon--after the first two days had passed, during which time Bella had lain flat in her berth in the large roomy cabin provided for her by her uncle, while his wife had

administered to her odd glasses of champagne, little cups of rich, succulent soup, and such like delicacies--the girl was able to reach the deck. And, once there and under an awning stretched from the ensign staff to past the mizzen-mast, she would sit and meditate for hours on the forthcoming meeting with her lover which was drawing nearer and nearer with each plunge of the Emperor's forefoot into the sapphire sea. Sometimes, too, she would read aloud a novel to Mrs. Pooley, who, perhaps because she was good and motherly, and fat, would listen to nothing but the most romantic love-stories which the vivid brains of fashionable novelists could turn out; though, when alone, and reading for her own amusement, Bella would pore over books of adventure in wild parts of the world, or devour some of the histories of marine voyages which her uncle possessed in his neat mahogany bookcases below.

Of Stephen Charke she saw, of course, a good deal, as it was natural she should do. You cannot be in a ship, however large or small, without seeing much of all on board; but when it comes to sitting down every twenty-four hours to what Captain Pooley called 'four square meals a day, with intervals between for refreshments,' you must not only be brought into constant touch with your companions, but also enter into much discourse with them. Yet, as the girl told herself, Charke was behaving well, extremely well; so that, gradually, she lost all sense of discomfort that would otherwise have arisen through being thrown continuously into his society, and, ere long, she would observe his approach without the slightest tremor of susceptibility. Soon, too, she began to acknowledge to herself that Stephen was a gentleman in his feelings, and that, no matter what his sentiments might be towards her--if they existed still and were unchanged from what they had once been--he at least knew how to exercise that control over them which a gentleman should be capable of. Until now, he had never said one word to her that any other person might not have uttered who had found himself thrown into her society on board the *Emperor of the Moon*, nor had he unduly sought her presence or, being in it, endeavoured to remain there as long as it was possible.

Nothing of much note had occurred thus far on the voyage, it has been said; yet there had of course been some of those incidents without which no voyage of any distance is ever made. Once through the Bay, and, while they ran swiftly south, they had found themselves in a dense fog--a most unusual thing in such a latitude and at such a time of year; then, upon the top of that fog, there had sprung up a stiff breeze which gradually developed into a gale, so that, from clewing the main royal to furling the top-gallant sails of the mizzen and foremasts was but the action of a moment, as was the next work of taking in the main top-gallant sail. And thus, ere long, Bella had her first experience of what a storm at sea was like, and, as she heard the live stock grunting and squealing forward; the ship's furniture more or less thundering about wherever it could get loose; the piano--on which, only the night before, she had played the accompaniment to her uncle's deep bass voice as he trolled out 'In Cellar Cool'--thumping heavily against the bulkhead to which it was usually lashed, and the cries of the sailors as they uttered words which might not, perhaps, be properly denominated as 'cries, alone, she began to wonder how her darling Gilbert could ever have chosen such a calling. While, too, the streaming planks when, at last, she ventured on deck, the dull sepia clouds and the mournful look of the Emperor herself, under reefed topsails, foresail, fore topmast staysail, main trysail and spanker, as she rolled and yawed about in the troughs and hollows of the sea, and took the water first over one bow and then over another--and then, for a change, over her stem--only increased that wonder.

Yet, lo! the next morning--for the sea is a great quick-change artist, volatile and variable as a flirt, though too often as tragic as Medea herself--when Bella looked out of her scuttle, against which the green water now slapped boisterously but not viciously--all was changed. A bright sun shone down from the blue heavens, the ship had still got a roll on her, though not an unpleasant one--and the girl felt hungry. Which was as good a sign that the storm was over as could well be wished for.

'It has been a rough night,' Stephen Charke said, as he rose from his breakfast on her entrance to the saloon, helped her to her chair, and bade the steward bring coffee and hot rolls and bacon--all of which were already perfuming the air. 'Your uncle is now on deck. We have been there all night.'

'I thought,' said Bella, pouring out her coffee and smiling pleasantly, since now all fear had departed from her mind that Charke would misconstrue any friendly marks of intimacy she might be disposed to graciously bestow on him, 'that I was at the end of my journey. Indeed, that we all were; that it was brought to a sudden end; accomplished. That---'

'That,' said Stephen, smiling too, sadly enough, yet enhancing wonderfully his dark, handsome looks by doing so, 'that perhaps Mr. Bampfyld might miss his bride!'

For a moment Bella's hazel eyes flashed at him, and he thought how wondrously beautiful they looked as they did so--then a serious expression came on her face. While, after pausing a moment, as though scarcely knowing what answer to make or whether she should make one at all, she said: 'Yes. That he might miss his bride. My death, and that alone, could cause him to do so.' And as she spoke she looked Stephen straight in the face, while feeling again--to her regret--that old sentiment of doubt of him which she had come to believe she had conquered and subdued.

'His death would cause the same result,' he answered, speaking slowly, hesitatingly, for in truth he felt as if he were treading on dangerous ground. And in a moment he found such was the

case.

'Mr. Charke,' the girl said, very quietly now, 'I should be so much obliged to you if, during the remainder of our journey together, you will neither discuss my affairs nor those of my future husband, nor him. It will make the voyage pleasanter to me if you will do that.'

As she spoke, the bell struck two, and, since the watches had been disorganised by the storm of the night, that sound meant that Captain Pooley would now come below for his breakfast, and his place above be taken by the mate. Therefore, he turned towards the stairs, muttering: 'I beg your pardon, I am sure. Pray forgive me. I will not offend again.' Then he disappeared on to the deck.

Yet an hour later he stood by her side beneath the awning, and now he was directing her attention to something that, a mile off, was the object of attention from every one on board. The captain and his wife were both regarding it fixedly; so, too, were the men forward; the only persons not present being, of course, the watch below and the second mate, Mr. Fagg, who had now turned in.

'What do you make it out to be?' asked Pooley of Stephen, as they still gazed at it. 'It is not a baby nor a child; yet it is scarcely bigger than the first. Can it be a dog?'

'No,' said Charke authoritatively, as though his younger eyesight was not to be disputed; 'it is either a young tiger or a panther cub afloat on a water-cask. There has been a wreck during the night, I expect, and it has got adrift. Perhaps,' he said, 'if we cruise around a bit we may find some human life to save.'

'How should it be aboard any ship?' asked the captain. 'Who takes tigers or panthers for passengers?'

'Plenty of people,' Charke answered quietly. 'They are brought home to sell to the menageries and zoos. A cub like that is worth twenty pounds--worth looking after. Guffies bring them home sometimes, sailors often. Meanwhile,' he added, 'according to the set of the waves, that thing will be alongside us in a quarter of an hour. I'll bet a day's pay it strikes the ship betwixt the main and mizzen channels.'

'Oh,' exclaimed Mrs. Pooley and Bella together, 'do let us save it and get it on board! It will,' said the latter, 'be such a lovely plaything--and such a curiosity! Fancy a girl from West Kensington who has never had a plaything or pet more stupendous than a canary, a cat, or a fox-terrier, having a tiger. Why,' she exclaimed, with a laugh which gave to her short upper lip an appearance of tantalising beauty, 'Una will be outdone by me--a girl of the nineteenth century!'

Tantalising or not as that smile might be, it led to the salvation of the cub; for, with a swift look at the captain which was meant to ask for his assent, Charke called to one of the sailors to get over into the channels and down on to the fourth futtock, he telling him with wonderful accuracy the exact spot where the water-cask would strike the stationary ship. Five minutes later, that which he had calculated with such precision came to pass, the cask touched the vessel's side almost immediately beneath the man's feet, and, in another moment, the cub had been caught by its loose skin in the exact middle of its back and hauled up, squealing, spitting and scratching, on to the deck.

'The little beast!' exclaimed the mate, as he sucked the back of his hand where the creature had clawed him; 'the little beast! this is a pretty reward for our saving it from drowning!' and he administered a sound kick to the thing as it lay on the deck. So sound and rousing a one, indeed, that it gave a grunt of pain, and, with its claws--about as big, or bigger, than those of a good-sized cat--endeavoured to fasten on to his legs. While, from its yellow, scintillating eyes, it emitted a glance of such malignant ferocity as, had it been more fully grown, might have alarmed a braver man than he.

'Oh, how cruel to kick that poor little half-drowned thing!' Bella exclaimed reproachfully; 'it never meant to hurt you, only it was frightened. Poor little thing!' she said again, and, even as she spoke, she knelt down on the deck and stroked the wet, striped ball that lay there. And it seemed as if her gentleness had some power to soothe whatever ferocious instincts--still dormant and undeveloped at present--were smouldering within it. For, instead of now using its paws as weapons with which to strike out and attack anything near it, it played with her as a kitten plays with a ball, tapping at her hand and trying to catch it, and pushing and kicking against her with its hind legs.

'You see,' she said, looking up at Charke with a glance in which she could not disguise her dislike of his violence, 'you see, at present, at least, it does not try to harm those who treat it well.'

'Yes,' he said, 'I see.' Then he added, half-bitterly, half-morosely: 'No one doubts your powers of fascination, Miss Waldron.'

CHAPTER VIII

'HIS NAME IS--WHAT?'

The saving of this creature, which Bella elected to call Bengalee, because she said she was sure it came from Bengal, and also because she had once sung a song having that name, was followed by no other events of any importance whatever. Nor need their stay at the Cape be dwelt upon, because it consisted simply of various visits which were paid in the outskirts by Mr. and Mrs. Pooley, accompanied by Bella; by the unloading of a considerable portion of the cargo of the *Emperor of the Moon*, and by the refilling of the hold with other goods saleable in India.

And, now, they were once more on their way towards the Equator, going due north instead of due south, as when they had last approached it, and with a cool southern breeze driving the Emperor along under full sail. Yet, so gentle was this breeze that, even if there had been any who were not sailors in the ship--as Bella, as well as Mrs. Pooley, might now well be considered, after the length of voyage she had already gone through, added to a few extra days and nights of turbulence and storm--scarcely would they have felt any inconvenience from the motion. Thus, therefore, with occasionally a dropping of the wind which reduced their speed a few knots, and, sometimes, with a total drop in it, so that they did not progress a knot an hour, while the ship swung slowly round and round the compass, they found themselves at the time which is about to be described in about Latitude 45.10 S., and Longitude 30.50 E., or, as near as may be, about 250 miles to the S.W. of Mauritius.

Wherefore, since the *Emperor of the Moon* has arrived thus far in the Indian Ocean there has now to be set down a series of strange events which befell her, of so remarkable and peculiar a nature that one wonders that those events have never been chronicled before. For, far different from the ordinary stress and disasters which overtake ships at sea were those which have to be described; far different from those which the recorders of maritime calamities are in the habit of chronicling either in romance or dry-as-dust descriptions of facts.

All of which the writer now proceeds to relate, beginning with so strange a coincidence as, perhaps, none but those readers who, in their voyage through life, have recognised that truth is more strange than the wildest fiction, will be willing to allow within the bounds of likelihood. However, to make a beginning--since the coincidence is true--the *Emperor of the Moon* was in those latitudes above described when, it being a bright hot morning with the sea already gleaming like molten brass, with the pitch between the planks already of the consistency of putty, and with the brasswork in such a state of heat that it was unsafe to touch it unless one wanted to leave the skin of his palms and fingers behind them, the look-out on the fo'c's'le head yelled: 'Sail, right ahead!' Now, since nothing of this kind, neither steamer nor sailing vessel, had been seen since they had northed out of the west-wind drift, and since, also, the liners were rarely found outside of the Equatorial current, this cry was sufficient to fill every one on board with a considerable amount of interest and excitement.

'Whereaway?' called out Charke, who was on the poop at this moment, the captain, his wife, and Bella being below at breakfast; and, ere the man could repeat that the sail was right ahead and about five miles off, all those others there had come on deck.

'How pretty it looks, shining in the sun!' the girl exclaimed, as she regarded it through a pair of marine glasses which her uncle had placed at her disposal; 'and how the sail glistens! It looks like a star.'

'Humph!' said the captain, as he gazed through his binocular. 'Like a star! True enough, so it does. And,' he said, addressing the two mates who were standing near him, 'we have seen such stars hereabouts before, eh? Do you think,' he went on, addressing Charke, lowering his voice a little, 'it is one of those?'

'Don't know,' Charke said, working his own glass a good deal. 'Can't see how it can be; too far to the east. Bussorah, Muscat, Ras-el-Had, Mohamrah, Oman--that's their mark. What should they be doing here?'

'All the same,' exclaimed Pooley, 'it's the rig, and the true shape, that of a Jargonelle pear cut in half. I do believe that's what it is. They might have been blown out of their course, you know, or chased by one of Her Majesty's ships. What do you think?'

'I think,' said Charke, who always spoke of everything connected with his calling in the most unemotional manner possible, 'I think we shall know when we come up to her, as we must do in about half an hour. While,' he continued, with a subdued tone in his voice, while his eye glinted sideways towards where Bella stood, 'we are not naval officers but only humble merchant seamen. There's no prize-money for us, therefore it is not our business.'

Bella had, of course, been listening attentively to all that had been said since she had come on deck after running lightly up the poop ladder, and now, hearing these words about 'naval officers'

and 'prize-money,' her interest became more intense than before.

'Oh, uncle!' she exclaimed, putting her hand on his sleeve, 'what does it all mean? Naval officers and prize-money! That's not one of Her Majesty's ships?'

'No, my dear,' the captain replied, 'that is not one of Her Majesty's ships; but I shall be precious surprised if she doesn't turn out to be one of the very craft that Her Majesty's ships are always on the look-out for hereabouts, only rather closer in towards the African coast than this. She has all the build of an Arab slave-dhow.'

'Ay,' exclaimed Charke, who was still using his glass freely, from where he stood behind them. 'Ay, and something more than the build, too. If I'm not mistaken, her hatches have open gratings. What do you say, Fagg?' turning to his junior.

'Seems so, sir,' said that young officer, who never wasted more words than necessary, 'though I'm not quite sure.'

'I am,' replied Charke. 'I can see the grating slits perfectly as we get nearer.'

'What does that mean?' asked Bella, to whom this conversation conveyed nothing.

'It means,' said Pooley, 'that there is live stock below those gratings. Black cattle, as they used to be called on the West Coast. Ordinary hatches, to simply cover up cargo, are not made to let the air in. Cargo can do without breathing.'

'How awful!' Bella exclaimed, while through her mind there ran recollections of what she had heard or read casually of the slave trade in the old days, and also of the horrors of the North-West passage. 'How awful!'

'Bad enough,' replied Pooley, 'though not as bad as the old West African days, nor as shocking as you might think. The slave trade is a valuable one in this ocean, and those who are carried in the dhows are well enough fed. Rice, Indian corn, maize, and cassava is given them for food, and they have mats and matting galore to sleep on. Persian merchants and Arab gentlemen don't buy starved scarecrows for their domestic servants.'

'Whatever she is, and whatever her cargo is, there's something wrong with her,' the chief mate suddenly exclaimed. 'She's off the wind now, and the fellow who was at the helm has left it. It is abandoned. By Jove!' he exclaimed, 'he is lying wriggling by it. What on earth's the matter?'

'And,' added the second mate, 'there's a negro woman waving a red scarf. Something's wrong there, no doubt.'

'We shall be up to them in ten minutes,' the master said, all bustle and excitement now. 'Let go the foretack. Stand by to lower the starboard-quarter boat'; while, as he spoke, the men of the watch who had been leaning on the five-rail rushed to the falls to be ready to let the boat sink to the water when the proper moment came. To Bella this seemed the most exciting moment of her life! There, in front of her, was one of those vessels, the name of which, or class of which, was almost unknown to her, except that, from odds and ends of conversation with her lover, she had gathered that these were the things in the chasing of which part of his existence might be passed until they met once more at Bombay. Here, on this glistening, glassy sea, the dhow lay--her one mast raking towards her bow instead of her stern, as is the case with most vessels of the Western world, and her long white triangle of a sail unfilled and flapping listlessly. A dhow--perhaps a slaver! as her uncle and the mate had said--a dhow in sore distress with, writhing by her helm, the man who had lately been steering her, and, over her bow, that negro woman waving frantically the red scarf. Excitement there was, indeed, in all this; excitement which caused Bella, even as she eagerly watched the vessel they were approaching, to wonder how the striking up of the band at a ball, or the ring of the prompter's bell ere the curtain rose on a drama that all London was flocking to see, could have ever stirred her pulses. What were they, those trivialities, to the smiling, glistening face of this Eastern sea--to the horror and the cruelties that this now tranquil ocean's bosom had enfolded through the ages.

Still the negress waved, not recognising, perhaps, in her blind, besotted, dumb, animal-like ignorance that help was at hand, and still, through their glasses, they could see that he who had steered the dhow now lay motionless. Then, at her ear, as the *Emperor* came within six cable-lengths of the dhow, her uncle gave a few rapid orders, the second mate, accompanied by the boat's crew, jumped into the quarter-boat--the man at the wheel luffed until the vessel had not a motion in her. Swiftly the boat was lowered, the rudder and thole pins shipped, and she was on her way to the dhow.

'What do you make of it?' the master roared to Fagg ten minutes later, as, by then, the *Emperor of the Moon* had come closer to the dhow through the motion of the swell. 'What?'

'I don't know what to make of it, sir,' the second mate called back. 'The man who was steering is, I think, dead. He does not move, and there is a white film over his eyes. The woman who waved the handkerchief seems well, but I cannot understand what she means. She does nothing but howl and point below.'

'Are the hatches grated?'

'Yes, sir, and there are four negroes beneath them. It is a slave dhow for certain. The negroes are shackled and handcuffed.'

'Have you searched further?'

'I am going to do so now. The ship is settling, I think. There is a kind of poop superstructure forming cabins.'

'Search at once; then bring all alive on board us.'

In a moment Mr. Fagg had disappeared into what he had termed a 'kind of poop superstructure,' and, while he was in it, all on board the *Emperor* were occupied in speculating on what could have brought a slaver so far to the East and out of her ordinary course, and also in wondering what the mate would find during his further search.

But that wonderment was soon to be resolved, for, ere Mr. Fagg had been out of their sight five minutes, he rushed back from the superstructure to the deck, and bawled through his hands:

'There is a young naval officer lying in the poop cabin, and he is slightly wounded. His name is--is----'

'What?' roared Pooley, astonished at the mate's hesitation.

'It is marked on the rim of his cap--inside. It is--I--I am afraid it is Miss Waldron's *fiancé*. The--the--name is Bampfyld.'

CHAPTER IX

[Come over, come home](#)
[Through the salt sea foam.](#)

Never, perhaps, on all that old highway of the waters, that silent road along which so many had steered their course to fabled Ormuz and to Ind, nor amidst fierce sea-fights 'twixt Arab and Persian, or Arab and European in later centuries, nor in the howl of storm when the waters closed around the shipwrecked and doomed, had there arisen a more piercing shriek than that which now issued from Bella Waldron's blanched lips.

'My God!' she screamed, repeating the second mate's words. "'The name is Bampfyld!" Oh, it's Gilbert--Gilbert! There is no other in the Navy List. Let me go to him, uncle!'

'No, no,' the master said, while good Mrs. Pooley put her arms round the girl as she stood there by the poop-rails and endeavoured to calm and soothe her. 'No, no, Bella; they will bring him on board directly, then,'--and in his desire to ease the girl's heart he raised the ghost of a smile to his lips--'then you shall nurse him till he is well. Yet,' he muttered to Charke, as he walked over to where the first mate stood, 'yet, how on earth does he find himself in that infernal dhow!'

'Heaven knows,' the other answered. 'But, perhaps, 'tis not so strange, after all. There may have been a fight between his ship and the slaver--though there's not much fight in them when they get a sight of the British Flag!--or he may have been sent to board her and got cut down, or half-a-hundred things. All of which,' he added, with his now usual cynicism, 'are equally likely or unlikely. Anyhow, he is here--or will be in a few moments--and we shall have him for a passenger to Bombay. Your niece is in luck, sir,' and he turned on his heel and went down the ladder to the deck to see to the raising of the boat, which was now making its way back to the ship.

To Stephen Charke, still loving the girl as madly as he did, still raging inwardly at the knowledge that every knot which the ship made was bringing her nearer to the man who, as he considered, had torn her from him, this incident seemed the last and most crushing blow of all. God knows what hopes the mate had cherished in his bosom since first he had learnt that Bella was to be a passenger in her uncle's ship for about four months; what ideas might have been revolving in his mind as to whether, in those four months, something extraordinary, something almost unheard of--not to be dreamt of nor foreseen--might happen to give him one more chance of winning her. He was a romantically-minded man, a man with so rich an imagination that, to him, there sometimes came ideas that few are ever burdened with. And, in that full and teeming

imagination, there had been pictured to him visions of the *Emperor of the Moon* being wrecked and Bella and he alone spared--he, of course, saving her at the peril of his own life and winning her away from her more aristocratic lover by so doing. Or, he dreamt of that lover being himself wrecked and lost, or pierced by an Arab spear in some affray, or shot in a hand-to-hand fight with a particularly bold slaver (since he knew well enough that the ships of the Bombay station were often enough down here) or--or--or he cherished any mad vision that first rose to his brain.

And now--now--this very man, this successful rival, this aristocratic naval officer, with his high birth and future peerage, was actually being brought aboard the ship where the woman was whom they both loved--brought on board 'slightly wounded,' and his own last chance thus gone. Gone for ever now! Perhaps, therefore, it was no wonder he should bite his lip and smother unholy murmurs deep down in his throat; perhaps, too, he merits compassion. He had loved this girl fondly since first he set eyes on her, and once, at one time, he thought he had almost won her. Then this other had come in his way, had swept him out of Bella's heart, or the approach to it, and his chance was over. Yet, once again, they had met through an almost unheard of, and scarcely to be imagined, opportunity, and--lo! here was his successful rival once more at hand to thwart him. It was hard on him, or, as he muttered to himself, 'devilish rough.'

The quarter-boat was coming back to the ship now, Fagg steering her, while, between him and the stroke oar, there lay the body of the young naval officer, clad in his 'whites.' And again as Bella, madly whispering 'Gilbert, Gilbert, my darling,' stood by the head of the accommodation ladder--which had been lowered while the boat was gone to the dhow--the men brought her lover gently up and laid him on the deck under the awning.

'Oh, Gilbert!' she cried again, as now she bent over him, while stroking his hair, which, on the left side of his head, was all matted with thick coagulated blood, 'Oh, Gilbert! to think that we should meet thus! Sir!' she screamed to Fagg, who was about to descend again to the boat to fetch off the others still in the dhow, 'where is he wounded? Where? Have you had time to discover?'

'I have looked him over, Miss Waldron, and, to tell you the truth, I do not think there is much the matter with him.'

'Thank God! Oh, thank God!'

'That blood,' the second mate continued, 'comes from a heavy contusion at the side of his head, but the skull is uninjured. Also there is no concussion--observe the pupils of the eyes are not at all dilated.' Then he turned away and went swiftly down the ladder again, muttering that, if he was to save the Arabs and the negroes, there was no time to be wasted. The dhow was filling fast, he added. There was a big hole in her below the waterline, and a quarter of an hour would see the end of her.

And now Gilbert was carried to the cabin corresponding with Bella's on the port side of the vessel, aft of the saloon, and Mrs. Pooley, with the steward, went in to undress him, telling Bella that, as soon as he was comfortably placed in the bunk, she should come and take her place by his side. Whereon the girl, distracted by both her hopes and fears--hopes that the second mate was right in his surmises as to her lover's wounds, and fears that he was wrong--sat herself down on the great locker that was in the gangway, and gave herself up to tearful meditations.

'Ah, if he should die!' she murmured; 'if he should die! Then my heart will break.'

Though, as you shall see, and have undoubtedly divined, Gilbert was not to die then, at least.

But, by this time, other things were taking place above which were almost as startling as the discovery of Lieutenant Bampfyld in that slave-dhow. Startling, not only because of the unexplained cause that had brought the Arab slaver into this portion of the Indian Ocean, but also because of the strange and mysterious behaviour of those others who were now being conveyed on board the *Emperor of the Moon*. Ere they came, however, Mr. Fagg had sent over information surprising enough in itself, and sufficient to prepare all on board the ship for what, a little later, they were to see.

'The owner--if he is the owner,' he cried, 'the man who fell down while steering, is dead. He is stiffening. I presume I had best leave him to go down with the dhow?'

'Ay,' called back Pooley. 'Ay. What about the others?'

'I cannot make them out. The negress seems well enough, but terribly frightened. As for the four men below, they all appear blind. We have taken their shackles off and they grope their way about as though in the dark. My men have to lead them up the ladders--yet their eyes look clear enough.'

'Have they been kept in the dark, think you, and is the sun dazzling them now?'

'No, sir. The open gratings have furnished the part of the hold they were in with plenty of light.' He paused a moment, and those in the *Emperor* saw him gazing down steadfastly to that hold; then he called again: 'We must come away now, sir. The water is pouring in. The dhow will not swim much longer.'

'Do so,' answered back Pooley; and five minutes afterwards the boat was on her way to the ship, laden with the rescued negroes. Mr. Fagg had proved right in his surmise as to the necessity for leaving the slaver at once. For, ere he came on board, she was observed to heel over a little to starboard, then to further do so with a jerk; then, suddenly, she righted until she was on a level keel--and, next, sank below the waves like a stone, the body of the dead man, who had fallen down while steering, alone remaining above the heaving waters, and being swirled round and round in the whirlpool caused by the wreck, until it too went down.

Creeping up the companion, their hands directed to the side-ropes by the sailors; feeling the steps with their huge splay feet--as a mule feels its way along the thin line of insecure path that rounds the smooth face of a precipice--those stricken men came; huge, splendid specimens of the swart negroes of Wyassa and Wahiyou and Wagindo, whom the Arab slaver ships from Kilwa, below Zanzibar, and transports to Bussorah and Mohamra, whence they often reach the more distant Turkish harems. Now, looking at them as they stood on the deck of the *Emperor of the Moon*, it seemed as though their course was almost run. For, though these men would never be slaves to Arab or Persian or Turk, of what use to himself or any one else is an unhappy blind nigger who, to exist at all, must work like a dray-horse?

'Poor wretches!' said Pooley to Charke as they both stood regarding these blacks, 'see how the shackles have eaten into their ankles. Poor brutes! They say that sometimes these fellows sell themselves willingly into slavery; I doubt much if these have done so. Ah, well! we must take them with us to Bombay, where, at least, they will be free. I wish,' he added, 'we could communicate with them somehow and learn who and what they are.'

'Perhaps,' said Charke quietly, unemotionally as ever, 'Lieutenant Bampfyld can tell us when he comes to. Since he was in the dhow, he probably knows what she was and where she came from.' Then, breaking off to cast his eye around, he said: 'Sir, there is a breeze coming aft. Shall we not make sail?'

'Ay,' cried Pooley, springing to the poop, 'ay, we have had little enough wind for some days. Summon the watch.'

A few moments later the order to square the yards thundered along the deck; the men rushed to the braces. Far off, up from the dusky, wizard south, the wind was coming as they fisted the canvas, and the *Emperor*, heeling over, gathered way and sped once more towards India. She gathered way faster and faster as outer jib and topsails were loosed and sheeted home, fore and main top-gallant sails and spanker yards braced sharp up, and main-sail, main-royal and mizzen top-gallant sails set, as well as jibs and staysails. She talked, as the sailors say, as she went through the water; she hummed and sang beneath the breeze that came up from far down by the Antarctic circle--a breeze whose cool breath was gone and was, instead, perfumed now by the warm spicy odours of adjacent Mauritius and Reunion. Away, over the vast waste of golden waters she flew, and the master, standing on the poop, called down to his first mate joyfully to ask him if this would not do well enough for Bombay.

'Ay, ay, sir,' answered Charke, turning round from giving orders to the men aloft to answer his chief. 'Ay, ay, sir.'

While to himself he muttered: 'Bombay! India! Well, when we are there, all is ended for me!'

CHAPTER X

THE GROWING TERROR

The sailor is, as all the world knows, a light-hearted, mercurial creature. Face to face with death in some form or other during every hour of his life--although, often, the mere presence of death is neither known nor suspected--he is only too elated and happy when momentarily without anything to cause him anxiety. Such was the case now with Captain Pooley, since his beautiful ship was rapidly picking up all the time she had lost by lack of wind and delays, 'and since,' as he jovially phrased it, 'all his new passengers were doing well.'

'First and foremost,' he said that evening, as he sat at the head of his table with Bella in the place of honour on his right hand, his wife on the left, and Mr. Fagg opposite to him, while his honest, sunburnt face gleamed rubicund beneath the inch of white under his hair which his cap had preserved from the sun, 'Bella's young man is all right. Then Bella's new plaything, the tiger, takes kindly to its lodgings--though you will have to sell it, my child, directly we get to Bombay, and distribute the money it fetches among the men. Then those wretched slaves--even they will eat and drink, won't they, Fagg?'

'Not much of that, sir,' the second mate answered, who was eating and drinking pretty well himself, however; 'they don't care to do much of either. They make a good deal of moaning up in that deck-cabin forward which you have given them. The woman, however, seems all right. I suppose the lieutenant has not been able to tell you much about the dhow yet, Miss Waldron?' he asked, bending forward a little as he addressed her.

'At present,' she replied, 'we have had little conversation. He says, however, that he sent me a telegram from Bombay, telling me not to start as the *Briseus* was coming down here. He only came to an hour ago, however,' she went on, while a ravishing blush swept over her face, 'and we--we--have had so much to----'

'Spare her, Fagg,' said Pooley, with a laugh, and passing the claret at the same time. 'Spare her. Suppose you woke up one fine afternoon and found your sweetheart bending over you in your berth and whispering all sorts of endearing things in your ears, as well as kiss----'

'Uncle!' cried Bella, while Mrs. Pooley touched her husband's arm reprovingly with her forefinger, and Mr. Fagg hid his face behind the vase of brilliant Cape gooseberries on the table. 'Uncle!' Whereon the bluff, good-natured sailor desisted, and began to speculate on the blindness with which the rescued negroes were attacked, and on that attack being, as he imagined, a recent one. 'They capture these poor wretches inland,' he went on musingly, 'in the big lake region as often as not; but, as far as I have ever heard, blindness is not one of their afflictions. Moreover, these Arab owners and captains wouldn't buy blind slaves, either for selling farther north, or for using as sailors in their dhows. Therefore, I take it, this blindness must have come on them since they were shipped. That's strange, isn't it?' while, as he spoke, he rose, and went to his neat mahogany bookcase which was securely fastened to one of the saloon's bulkheads, and took down the two medical works he possessed--the one dealing with all general human complaints to which our flesh is heir, and the other with tropical diseases more especially. Yet neither under the heading of 'Eye,' nor 'Blindness,' nor 'Optics,' could he find aught that bore upon the subject; nor, in his book on tropical complaints, could he discover any information that might enlighten him as to why the four negroes should be so stricken.

He spoke again, however, after turning over the leaves of these erudite volumes a second time, saying: 'Fever, I know, sometimes produces blindness as an after-effect, yet--well, we have all seen these fellows, and there's no fever in them, I should say. Oh, deuce take this confusion of tongues!' he exclaimed irritably; 'if it did not exist we could find out so much from the sufferers themselves. Bella, our only hope is in you and your patient. If Lieutenant Bampfyld can't tell us something, we shall never know who these men and the woman are, where they came from, what is the matter with them, and to whom the dhow belonged. Can he speak anything but English, child?'

'He knows some Hindustani,' Bella replied; 'and, I think he said, some words of Swahili. He has taken up Eastern languages in the Service, which was one of the reasons for his being appointed to the *Briseus*. He may be some help. At least he can tell us how he came on board that horrid ship.'

As she spoke, eight-bells struck on deck, and, as the sound came through the skylight, both she and Mr. Fagg rose, the girl doing so because it was the hour at which she intended to visit Gilbert again, and the latter because it was time to relieve Stephen Charke, who would now come below to take his supper. For Bella had fixed this hour for paying her last evening visit to her future husband because she knew that the second mate would then descend, and she was never now desirous of being more in his company than necessary.

She therefore left the saloon before Fagg could have relieved Charke, and, going to the cabin in which Gilbert Bampfyld lay, pushed back the curtain that hung at the door and went in to him, while observing as she did so that he was awake and gazing upwards as he lay. And she saw that he smiled happily on perceiving her, and whispered the word 'Darling' as she advanced to his bedside.

'You are better, dearest,' she said, bending over him and putting her hand on his forehead, which was cool and moist. 'Much better. Aunt will come soon with fresh bandages for your poor head, and then you will have a good night's refreshing sleep. And to-morrow, perhaps, you will be able to tell us how you came to be in that hideous slaver. Oh, Bertie!--for so she often called him--'what a mercy it was that we found you as we did. And what a miracle that we should have met thus. Home-keeping and narrow-minded people would say, if they read it all in a book, that such a thing was unnatural and impossible.'

Their first meeting, their joy at discovering that they had come together again in this marvellous manner; their rapture when, a few hours before, Gilbert Bampfyld had emerged from his stupor and unconsciousness, has not been forgotten, although the description of it has been omitted. Omitted for the simple reason that most of us have been, or are, lovers; most of us have known in our time, or know now--and those are the happy ones!--the sweet, unutterable joy with which such meetings are welcomed. Who does not remember the sudden, quickened beat of the heart at some period of their existence, as they met again the one they loved the best of all in this world; the creature upon whom their thoughts were for ever dwelling, and from whom those thoughts, however wandering they had heretofore been, were, at last, never more to roam! Picture to yourself, therefore, what rhapsody was Bella's when, forgetting everything else but

that she held her lover to her heart, she wept over his salvation from an awful, swift, impending death; picture also to yourself the delirious joy which coursed through Gilbert's now unclouded mind, as he found himself in her arms--with her--close to her. Picture this, and no further description is needed of their meeting in that cool, darkened cabin of the old ship. Imagine for yourself what your own ecstasy would have been in such or kindred circumstances, and you possess the knowledge of what theirs was.

'Darling,' he said again now, as she held to his lips a cooling drink that she had brought into the cabin with her, 'darling, I can tell you in half-a-dozen sentences or less----'

'No,' she said. 'No; not now. To-morrow, when you have slept----'

'Yes, now. Why, dearest, I am well! I could take the middle watch to-night if necessary, or--or--do anything that a sailor may be called on to do. And as for finding me in that dhow, why, it's the simplest thing on earth--or the waters. Listen. The *Briseus*, as you would have learnt by that telegram I sent you if you had ever received it, was suddenly ordered to join the Cape Squadron--dhow-catching. And I can tell you we were not so very long before the game began, since by the time we were abreast of Kilwy--which is the southern limit of the legal slave trade--we fell in with twelve dhows, one of them being our friend from which I was rescued by your people. And you may depend we were after them like lightning, while beginning to ply them with shell and shot from our little gun forward. They scattered, of course, though some got hit and lay disabled on the water, while I went off in the whaler with her crew to attack one that seemed badly knocked about. The one in which I was when found by you.'

'The horror!' exclaimed Bella, with a pretty shudder.

'No, no; don't call her that, because, after all, I owe my life to her.'

'Well, the angel!' exclaimed Bella now, with sudden change.

'Though I don't altogether know that the captain meant to save me----'

'The wretch! I'm glad he's dead.'

Gilbert laughed at these variations in Bella's mental temperature. Then he continued.

'They are artful--incredibly artful--in these dhows. They will let our pinnaces or whalers or any other of the ship's boats come alongside, then, all of a sudden, they cut their lee halliards, and down comes their great sail over us, enveloping the boat and all in it, just as if it was in a net or a bag.'

'Ah!' gasped Bella.

'And that's not all. When you are caught like that, they have another pleasing little way of firing at you from above through the canvas, so that you are being shot down while, all the time, you have no chance of escape.'

'Oh!' exclaimed Bella. 'To think of it! Ah, the wretches.'

'They do, Bella. Fortunately, however, this one couldn't do it, being disabled, and she had, therefore, come up to the wind with hardly any way on her. This was all right for us, as I meant to board, so as we came alongside each other we hooked on to her anchor cable, which was hanging pretty low down, and we should have got on board, too, only at that moment the dhow gave a lurch which sent the whaler half-seas under, and I got a blow on the head which knocked me insensible----'

'Oh, Gilbert! That wound on your head!'

'I suppose so. At any rate, I knew no more about it; and I don't know anything further, now, since I was insensible till I woke up here this morning and found you bending over me. However, I'm all right now, or soon shall be.'

'But how did you come into the dhow you were found in?' Bella asked, while pouring out, directly afterwards, one question after another. 'And when did it happen--yesterday, or a week ago? And where was the whaler, and the sailors, and the *Briseus*? And why did they all desert you? What a nice kind of a captain yours must be, to be sure!'

'My opinion is now,' said Gilbert, 'that the dhow you found me in, rescued me--picked me up. And I expect our captain--he is a rattling good skipper, Bella, all the same--heard I was drowned and thinks I've missed my muster. My cousin Jack will imagine for a month or so--till we get in to Bombay--that he is the future Lord D'Abernon,' and he laughed as he thought of how soon Cousin Jack would be undeceived.

'But the dhow we found you in--how did she escape, and why didn't the *Briseus* capture her?'

'Some must have got off in the confusion since it was only an hour from dark. I'm certain to be reported lost when the ship goes into either Zanzibar or Aden, and---- What's that?' he exclaimed, breaking off suddenly. 'Surely that's your uncle's voice!'

He recognised it because Captain Pooley had been in to see him after he recovered his consciousness and had congratulated him on doing so, as well as on being practically restored, while saying also that he was delighted at being the means of rescuing him out of the sinking slaver.

'Yes,' Bella replied, 'that's uncle's voice; and the other is that of Mr. Charke, the first mate.'

'Listen! What is it he is saying?'

It was perfectly easy to hear what he was saying, since both master and mate were conversing in the saloon, to which Charke had descended. And the words which reached their ears, as they fell from the latter's lips, were: 'Oh, no doubt about it whatever, sir; not the least. The negress is now as blind as the negroes themselves. She cannot see her way along the deck, nor any of the signs we have made before her eyes.'

CHAPTER XI

THE TERROR INCREASES

The southerly wind did not hold as it should have done considering the time of year, and the consequence was that the *Emperor of the Moon* was by no means making such a passage as was to be expected of her. Indeed, by the time that the second day had passed since the rescue of Gilbert from the slaver, and when the evening was at hand, she was almost motionless on the water, while such sails as were still left standing hung as listlessly as though they were suspended in a back room. Now, this was disheartening to all on board--that is to say, to all except one person--as is generally the case when such things happen. The master was grieved because he looked upon the delay as an absolute waste of valuable time, while as for Bella and Gilbert--well, it is scarcely necessary to write down here what they were looking forward to at the end of their journey, or what visions haunted the mind of the latter concerning the Cathedral in Bombay and a ceremony of marriage being performed at the altar-rails by the Bishop. Yet, all--passengers, master, officers and men--had to swallow their disappointment as best they might, and to recognise the fact that Bombay was still over three thousand miles away and not likely to be reached for very many days.

The one person who was, however, resigned to the affliction of delay was Stephen Charke, in whose brain there still lingered a wild and chimerical idea that there might yet be sent by Fate some extraordinary piece of good fortune which would, even at the last moment, sever Gilbert and Bella, with the subsequent result of bringing him and her together.

It has been said that he was a dreamer, and never had he been so more than now, since, sleeping and waking, he still mused on the possibility of some extraordinary set of circumstances arising which should force the girl into his arms. Yet, he had to own to himself that nothing was more unlikely than that any such circumstances could by any possibility arise. If anything visited these seas, this stupendous ocean, at this period of the year, it was most likely to be a flat calm such as that which they were now experiencing, instead of storms; and, even if storms should come, of what avail would they be to separate Gilbert Bampfylde and Bella Waldron?

'I am a fool,' he would mutter to himself, as he smoked his pipe in either the solitude of his own cabin or on the deck at night, 'a fool. A madman! One has only to observe how they love each other, how they never leave each other's side, to see that nothing could ever bring her to me. Even though she and I were cast on some deserted shore, even though I saved her from forty thousand threatened deaths--even though Bampfylde himself were dead and buried, she would never give herself to me. I am,' he would repeat again, 'a fool.' And this acknowledgment would, for a time, operate wholesomely on him--a man whose mind was not altogether that of a visionary and whose heart was not, by nature, a perverted or warped one--and he would resolve that, henceforth, he would think no more of this girl for whom his love was so fierce and, to him, so disturbing. He made resolutions, therefore, and kept them--until the next time that he saw the lovers together, smiling, talking, happy in each other--'billing and cooing,' as he called it, with a smothered curse.

They were on deck together, now, on the evening of the second day of calm as Stephen went up to take the first watch, since Gilbert had refused to remain a prisoner in the cabin allotted to him for more than twenty-four hours, and Pooley was also there, Fagg being below finishing his supper. Mrs. Pooley sat on the poop in a deck-chair engaged in some needlework she had constantly on hand, and, forward, the men were engaged in smoking and telling yarns, while the general idleness which pervades the fore-castle when a ship is becalmed prevailed everywhere. One man was reading a short story to his mates out of a country paper six months old, another had a sewing-machine between his legs with which he was mending his and his comrades,

clothes, a third was teasing and playing with 'Bengalee,' the tiger cub, which was growing--or seemed to be growing--fast. At present, however, it was safe to let it loose since it had no more strength than a large-sized cat, and teeth not much bigger than those domestic animals possess. Generally, the creature followed Bella about wherever she went, rolling down the companion ladder after her like a striped ball when she went below, or lying on the edge of her dress when she sat on deck; but at night it was shut up in a locker forward and looked after by the sailors. The hour for its temporary retirement had not, however, yet arrived, wherefore it was still gambolling about amongst the men.

Altogether, the vessel presented a peaceful scene as she lay 'idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean,' while, from forward, there came the droning voice of the sailor who was reading the storiette to his mates, interrupted only by the laughter of the others at the cub's leaps and growls; and, from the after part of the ship, the talk of the 'quarter-deck' people arose.

'Come,' said Pooley now, addressing Charke, 'come, let us go and look at those unfortunate niggers. The Lord knows what is to become of them. The woman, you say, never rises from the floor of the cabin, but only lies there and moans. It is the strangest thing I ever heard of in my life. I wish, Mr. Bampfyld,' turning to that gentleman as he passed with Bella, 'that you could give us some information about that dhow we found you in.'

But, of course, Gilbert could tell them no more than he had already done a dozen times, while repeating in substance all that he had said to his *fiancée*.

'I am sorry,' he had said on each occasion, and again said now, 'but I know absolutely nothing. I was insensible when I was taken into the dhow--as taken in I must have been, since I could never have got in by myself--and, as you are well aware, I was insensible when I was brought out. I positively know nothing.'

'The helmsman's death was as strange as anything,' Pooley observed. 'Fagg says there was no wound about him that he could see. What, therefore, could he have died of?'

'Sunstroke, I imagine,' the first mate said, in his usual emphatic, crisp manner. 'Sunstroke. It could not have been fever, otherwise these negroes would have it, too. Yet,' he went on, in a manner more meditative than usual with him, 'those Arabs, if he was an Arab, rarely suffer from that. It takes a white man to get sunstroke.'

'Well, come,' said the master again, 'let's go and see to them. The sun is on the horizon; it will be dark in a quarter of an hour's time.' Whereon he strode forward, accompanied by Charke, while Mr. Fagg, who had come up from the saloon, began to keep such watch as was necessary. And Gilbert, bidding Bella go and sit with Mrs. Pooley, strode after them, since he was anxious to have a look at the unhappy creatures who had been rescued at the same time as himself.

The male blacks had been put into a deck cabin (in which was usually kept an assortment of things such as spare lamps, a boat sail or two, and Mr. Fagg's bicycle, on which he disported himself whenever he got ashore anywhere), wherein some matting had been thrown down for their accommodation. And, as now they neared this cabin, they heard sounds proceeding from within it which were really moans, but, to their ears, had more the semblance of the bleating of sheep. Also, it seemed as if one of them within was chanting some sort of song or incantation.

'We shall have to stop this noise in some way, sir,' Charke said to the captain; 'it has been going on more or less ever since they came on board, and the men complain that it disturbs them in the fo'c's'le. It's a pity we can't communicate with them somehow. Perhaps Lieutenant Bampfyld might try, as he says he knows some words of Swahili'; while as he spoke he looked at the man who had once more, as he considered, or chose to consider, stepped in between him and the woman he loved. Yet, because he never forgot that he was a gentleman born, there was nothing in his manner that was otherwise than polite when he addressed Gilbert.

'I have tried,' said the latter, 'more than once to-day. And either my Swahili is defective, or that is not their language. I suspect that it's Galla, of which I do not know a word.'

Meanwhile, the captain had drawn back the cocoanut matting which hung in front of the deck cabin door, though, after peering into the sombre dusk for a moment, he started back, exclaiming: 'Good Heavens! what has happened now? Have they murdered one of their companions, or what?'

It was, in truth, a weird sort of scene on which he, as well as Gilbert and Charke, gazed, as the swiftly-fading tropical evening light illumined the interior of the cabin. Flat on the floor of it lay one of the negroes, undoubtedly dead, since there was on his face the gray, slate-coloured hue which the African assumes in death. Yet his eyes were open, only now, instead of that bright glassy look which all their eyes had had since they were brought on board, there was a dull filmy look, which told plainly enough that there was no life behind them. Still, dead as the man undoubtedly was, he did not present the most uncanny spectacle of all within! That was furnished by those who of late had been his comrades, and by the strange grotesqueness--a grotesqueness that was horrible in itself--of their actions. All three of the living negroes were on their knees in the cabin, which was roomy enough to amply admit of their being so, while, with their great black hands, they were pawing the man all over, feeling his breast and body, and endeavouring to bend

his fingers and toes as well as his legs and arms; while, even as they did so, from their great mouths came that moaning incantation which resembled so much the bleating of sheep. Doubtless they felt almost sure that their fellow-slave was dead, and these actions were being performed as tests. Yet, also, there was a solemn, wild unearthliness attached to the whole thing by the manner in which, when one of the visitors standing at the door and peering in made a remark, all turned their sightless eyes towards that door and then held up each a hand, and emitted a hissing noise through their great pendulous lips, as though enjoining silence and respect for the dead. They held up those hands with the fingers stretched enormously apart and with the palms towards the intruders. Their eyes were bright enough as they glared at the three white men outside, whom they could not see, yet, somehow, the gleam in them and the knowledge that they were sightless gave so creepy a feeling to those regarding them that they could not restrain a shudder.

'What in God's name is it?' exclaimed Pooley, he being the first to speak. 'What? What horrible disease that blinds them to commence with, and then kills--and kills not only negro, but Arab--captured and captor? Who--which--will be the next?'

As he spoke, a thought struck each of the three as they stood there gazing at one another in the swiftly-arrived darkness of the tropical night--a thought to which, however, not one of them gave utterance. *Who* would be the next? An Arab had died from some strange, unknown disease in the ship wherein these men had been found, and, now, one of them, too--a negro! Had, they reflected, this insidious horror been, therefore, brought into a ship full of white men? Would they also fall victims to that which had killed the others? That was the thought in their minds--in the minds of all of them, though not one gave voice to that thought.

'He must be got away from them--taken out of that cabin,' Pooley said, his speech a little changed now, and more husky and less clear than usual. 'Perhaps the woman, the negress, may be of some avail. I doubt if they will let us remove him without difficulty--though--poor blind things as they are--they could scarcely make any resistance. Go across to the other cabin, Mr. Charke, and fetch her over.'

He had been anticipated in his order, however, by the chief mate ere he spoke, Charke having, through some idea of his own, already crossed the deck to the opposite cabin in which the woman was placed. Therefore, as Pooley looked round to see why the mate did not answer him, he saw in the darkness that he was returning; while he perceived--even in this darkness, which was not quite all darkness yet, and by the light of the foredeck lantern--that Charke looked pale and agitated.

'The woman,' he said, 'is dead, too, I believe. She is lying on the cabin floor motionless--and cold.'

CHAPTER XII

'STRICKEN'

It was from this time that there began to creep over the ship a feeling shared by all, both fore and aft, that the voyage would not end without something untoward happening. What form, however, any misfortune which might come to them would be likely to take, none were bold enough to attempt to prophesy. Yet, all the same, the feeling was there, and, since every man on board the ship was a sailor, while, for the ladies, one was a sailor's wife and the other a sailor's future wife (each of whom was certain to be strongly receptive of the ideas and superstitions of her own particular sailor), it was not very strange that such should be the case. And, there was also in the thoughts of all that idea to which none of the men congregated outside the cabin, when the negro had been found dead, had ventured to give expression--the idea that the unknown, insidious disease--which had struck him and the negress, and also, possibly, the Arab *Negoda* down--might eventually seize on them. There were, however, at present at least, no symptoms of anything of the kind happening. All on board continued well enough, and, up to the time that the man and woman had both been buried in the sea for more than twenty-four hours, no complaints were heard from any one of feeling at all unwell, while the three remaining blacks seemed no worse than before.

Yet, it was a pity, perhaps, that at this time the ship should still have been forced to remain becalmed and almost motionless; that neither from south nor west any breeze blew--from the north and east there was scarcely a possibility of wind at this season--and that, except for the strong southern current which carried her along at a considerable though almost imperceptible rate, she hardly stirred at all. A pity, because it gave the sailors too many idle watches wherein to talk and chatter, to spin yarns of old-time horrors which had fallen upon vessels in different parts of the world, and to relate strange visitations which they had either personally suffered under or

had 'heard tell on,' and so forth.

Nor aft, in the saloon, did those who used it fail to discuss the strange circumstance of--not so much the death which had stricken the Africans--as the blindness that had fallen upon them. And here, Stephen Charke, better read perhaps than any of the others owing to his studious nature, was able to discuss the matter more freely than either the captain or those who sat at his table.

'I do distinctly recollect reading somewhere,' the mate said one evening, as all sat under the great after-deck awning, fanning themselves listlessly, while Fagg worked a kind of punkah which his ingenuity had devised, 'I do distinctly recollect reading somewhere of all those in a ship, on board of which was a large cargo of West African negroes bound for America, being stricken with blindness. I wish I could recall where I read it. In that way we might be able, also, to find out how to take some steps to avoid the same thing happening to us in the old *Emperor*.'

'A cheerful prospect, truly,' said the captain, 'if that is to occur'; and as he spoke he roamed his eye around the tranquil, glassy sea, on which there was not so much as a ripple. 'A pleasant thing, indeed, if one-half of us get blind and a rough time comes on. How, then, is the ship to be worked three thousand miles. How are the sails to be attended to?' and now he directed his eyes aloft to where all the canvas was neatly furled with the exception of the studding sails.

'We'll hope it won't be as bad as that, sir,' said Fagg. 'Only the black people, and those out of another ship than ours, seem to suffer. Until one of us,--by which he meant the Europeans on board--gets affected we haven't much to fear, I take it. While, you know, sir, we can find shelter before we reach Bombay. There are the Seychelles, for instance, from which we are not so very far off.'

'Such a delay as that would mean a very serious loss for me,' Pooley replied. 'As it is, I expect, one way or another, I shall miss one voyage out of two years.'

'I hope not,' said Gilbert Bampfyld, seriously, 'otherwise I shall begin to think it was a pity you ever came in contact with the dhow in which you found me.'

Yet, as he spoke, he saw Bella's beautiful eyes fixed on his face, and knew that no more crowning mercy had ever been vouchsafed to any two mortals than had been accorded to his sweetheart and himself by his rescue.

'Well,' said Pooley, 'we won't talk about that. I am devoutly thankful that we were enabled, by God's mercy, and also by the aid of something which is almost a miracle, to rescue you. For the rest a sailor must take all that comes in his way and never repine. The *Emperor* has been a good old tank to me; pray Heaven she continues so to the end.' Then he suddenly stopped and peered forward under the awning towards the forecabin, where, beneath another awning, the sailors had been lying about, some sleeping, some chatting idly, and most of them--even to those who had dropped off--with a pipe between their lips.

'What's that commotion forward?' he asked, addressing himself to Charke, who, ever on the *qui vive* as became a chief officer, had sprung to his feet and was gazing keenly towards the foredeck. 'What's the matter with the men, and why are those three holding Wilks up like that?'

'Forward there!' sang out Charke in a voice like a trumpet, as he, too, saw that which the master had described, namely, three of the hands standing up round the man named Wilks, and one grasping him on either side, while he himself pushed his arms out before him in a manner that implied a sort of doubting helplessness on his part. 'Forward there! What's the matter with that man?'

'He says he can't see, sir,' roared back another man on the forecabin deck, pulling his hair to Charke as he spoke. 'He was asleep just now; and then, when he woke up, he asked what time o'night it was because it was so dark.'

'My God!' exclaimed Pooley, while the faces of all around him took on a blanched, terrified look, and Bella, with the beautiful carnation of her lips almost white now, grasped her lover's arm. 'My God!' Then he turned to Fagg and muttered, repeating the other's words: "'Not much to fear until one of us gets affected.'" Heavens! we haven't had long to wait!'

While, following Charke who had already gone forward, and followed by Fagg, he went towards the forecabin.

His mates were bringing Wilks down the ladder now, since Charke sang out that he should be taken into the comparative darkness of their quarters at once, thereby to escape the glare of the sun; and not one of those who were eagerly watching his descent but observed how like his actions were to the actions of the blind negroes when they were brought off from the dhow, and the actions of the others to the behaviour of the men who had assisted them to come on board. For his companions directed his hands to the ladder's ropes even as the blacks, hands had been directed; while in each of his motions was the same hesitation, followed by the same careful grasping of the rail, as there had been in the motions of the slaves.

'Oh, Gilbert,' Bella exclaimed piteously, as she clung to him, 'what is going to happen? What is hanging over us? Supposing--supposing----'

'What, darling?'

'That--oh, I don't dare to say what I dread. But if this terrible thing should spread all through the ship. If uncle, if you, if all the sailors were attacked. And you--you--dearest; you, my darling.'

'Let us hope it will not come to that. Besides I, personally, matter the least of any----'

'Bertie!' she almost shrieked, alarmed, 'when you know that those others--some of them at least--that those poor black creatures have died after it. And you say that you matter the least of any; you, whom I love so.'

'I meant as regards the ship. I am not one of her officers, nor concerned in the working of her; and Bella, dearest Bella, don't get those dreadful ideas into your pretty head. Never give way to panic in an emergency. Doubtless some more will find their eyesight leave them--temporarily--but it can scarcely be that all will be attacked. And as regards death following, why, those other niggers are all right, and they are just as blind as those who have died!'

It happened--as so often such things happen in this world--that he spoke a little too soon. He hit upon the denial of the likelihood of a possibility occurring which, by a strange decree of fate or chance, was, at the very moment of that denial, to occur; since, just as the repudiation of such probability was uttered by him, and before the men helping Wilks had had time to get him comfortably into his berth in the forecabin, there arose once more that strange, weird, moaning kind of incantation from the deck-cabin in which the remaining negroes were, that had been heard before by all. And, added to it, was something more than any had heretofore heard, namely, a series of wild turbulent shouts in the unknown barbaric tongue used by the Africans--shouts that seemed to issue alone from one of their throats. A noise, a bellowing, in which, though on board the *Emperor of the Moon* there was not one person who could understand the words that voice uttered, all recognised the tones that denote fear, terror, and misery extreme.

Instantly, so stridently horrible were those cries, every one of the Englishmen about rushed towards the cabin, Pooley and Charke being the first there, while Gilbert, running forward from the afterpart and along the waist, was soon by their sides.

And then, looking in, they saw that the poor blind, excited savage who was emitting those shouts had, in truth, sufficient reason for his frenzy. He seemed--he was, indeed--demented, as, with both his great hands, he felt all over the bodies of his comrades who were lying lifeless on the cabin deck, and presented an awful appearance to those who gazed on him as his great features worked in excitement, his vast mouth, with its adornment of huge white teeth, opened and shut like a wild beast's at bay, and his blind, but brilliant, eyes glared hideously. That he was nearly mad with fright and terror was easily apparent, since, while recognising without seeing that there were others near, he snarled and bit at the space in front of him, and struck out with his fists or clawed at the air with his enormous hands.

'He will spring out at us directly,' Charke said, drawing to one side of the cabin. 'The fellow is mad with fear or grief.' Then, ready in expedient as ever, he ran the cabin door out of its slide and shut in the negro with his dead companions. Nor did he do so too soon, since, a moment later, those without heard the huge form of the man leaping towards the door; once they heard him slip, as though he had trodden on the body or one of the limbs of those lying dead on the floor; and then there came a beating and hammering on that door which seemed to promise that, in a few seconds, the panels would be dashed out and the maddened black be among them.

'This is too awful,' muttered Pooley. 'Is he really gone mad, do you think?' he asked, appealing to Charke, Gilbert and Fagg at one and the same time.

'No doubt about it,' they answered together. 'No doubt. And if he once gets out to the deck, sir,' said Charke, 'a dozen of us will not be able to hold him.'

'We must capture him if he does. Better throw a rope round him somehow. If he were not blind, we should have to shoot him. Ha! see, he has smashed open the panel! Stand by there, some of you men, to catch him as he leaps out.'

While, even as he spoke, the gigantic madman, with another howl, broke down the door and sprang amongst them.

CHAPTER XIII

'SPARE HER! SPARE HER!'

Mrs. Pooley, Bella and Gilbert sat alone in the saloon that night, the faces of the two women

being careworn and depressed in appearance, while on that of the young naval officer was a look, if not of consternation, at least of doubt and anxiety. That all of them should present this appearance of perturbation was natural enough, because by this time it was impossible to suppose that any less than a calamity was impending over the *Emperor of the Moon* and all in her. Two more men, named Burgess and Truby, had been attacked with blindness, while the negro, who had been the last survivor amongst the slaves, was himself now dead.

'It was too awful,' said Gilbert, who had come below to tell the ladies that which had happened above, since to keep silence on the subject was useless, in consequence of the turmoil in the ship which had accompanied the poor creature's last moments. 'He died a raving maniac--nothing short of that. You heard his howls and yells after we had got him safely tied up; *we* saw a sight that I, at least--and I should think everybody else--hope never to see again. Even roped as he was, his leaps and convulsions were something shocking. Thank God, they soon came to an end. I believe he died of the exhaustion caused by his mania.'

'What is to become of us all?' asked Mrs. Pooley sadly. 'What? The ship moves only by the current; my husband said just now that, if things go on and get worse, there will be none left to control her when the wind does come.'

'The trouble is,' said Gilbert, 'that, if they make sail when the wind springs up, there may be no men to take it in if that wind comes on too strong. And, at all events, it will be serious if more men are attacked. I have offered my services in any capacity if wanted, and will serve either as officer or man if Captain Pooley will let me.'

Bella threw an admiring glance at her lover in approval of what she, in her own mind, probably considered his noble disinterestedness; then she said:

'But surely all are not going to be attacked one after another in this way? And if so, uncle can't possibly think of trying to get to Bombay when the wind does come.'

'I have suggested the same thing to him that Fagg did this afternoon--namely, the Seychelles. They're all right, and the climate is first-rate for the tropics. He says, however, he will see what happens by the time we get a wind. He won't give in if no more men are attacked.'

Meanwhile, even as he spoke, each of the trio were occupied with thoughts which they would not have cared to put into language. Mrs. Pooley's were those good wifely reflections which busied themselves only with her husband's interests, and were disturbed by considerations of what a loss to him the delay would produce should it be further prolonged. Yet, there was also growing upon her, if it were not already full-grown--as was now the case with all others in the ship--a gruesome, indefinable horror of what might be the outcome of this strange affliction that had fallen on the vessel. Suppose, she had asked herself a hundred times in common with all the others on board--the sailors alone expressing their thoughts openly--suppose everyone in the *Emperor* succumbed to this blindness! What then would happen, even if it were not followed by death? Would they drift about the ocean helplessly if the calm continued, until they were seen and rescued by some other vessel; or, if a strong gale came up, would they--with no one capable of so much as steering the ship be shipwrecked and sent to the bottom? While, as to the horrible idea of death following on blindness, and the *Emperor of the Moon* drifting about, a floating catacomb--that was not to be thought about! It was too fearful a thing to reflect upon and still preserve one's sanity. Yet, all the same, not only was it thought about but talked about among the sailors, while many ideas were propounded as to what was to be done ere the worst came to the worst. As for Bella, her reflections were all of one kind, and one only. Would Gilbert be spared! For herself she cared but little, though she would scarcely have been the brave, womanly girl she was if she had not repined at the dark cloud which had now settled down over the existence of her lover and herself, and which threatened, if it continued to hover over them and their fortunes, to darken that existence still more. Further than this she did not dare to look, and, consequently, could only pray fervently that the cloud might be lifted ere long, even as she strove to force herself to believe that such would undoubtedly be the case.

Yet Gilbert's meditations were perhaps the most melancholy and bitter of any of the three persons now assembled in the saloon--brave, self-reliant young officer as he was, and full of hope and belief in many happy years still to come and to be passed in the possession of a beautiful and devoted wife, as well as in the service of a glorious profession. For he could not disguise from, nor put away from, his mind the recollection that, with his coming into this ship, with his rescue, there had come also that intangible, mysterious disease which was striking down those around him one by one at extremely short intervals; and, although he knew that he was no more responsible for its presence than if he had never been found in that accursed dhow, he began to think that there were many in the *Emperor of the Moon* who would regard him as being more or less so. Which, in truth, was a weak supposition, born in his usually strong, clear head by the calamities now happening with great frequency one after the other; a supposition shared by no one else in the ship. For--as he himself knew very well, yet took no comfort in knowing--had he not been in the dhow her other inhabitants would have been rescued all the same and taken off by Pooley, and would have brought on board with them the infection which was now supposed to be at the root of the disasters that were happening.

The meditations of all three were now, however, disturbed by the descent of Stephen Charke to the saloon, he being about to eat his evening meal before taking the first watch. As usual and,

almost, it seemed, unjustly so--since never had he said any further words to Bella which she could construe into an approach to anything dealing with his regard for her--his appearance was unwelcome to her. He seemed, however, to be entirely oblivious of what her sentiments towards him might be, and, after giving a slight bow to both ladies, rang the bell for the steward to bring him his supper. Then, as he seated himself at the table, he said:

'I fancy we shall have to avail ourselves of your offer of service after all, Lieutenant Bampfyld, and in spite of our having refused it an hour ago. Fagg,' he went on, as he cut himself a crust from the loaf, 'is attacked with blindness now.'

'Great Heavens!' exclaimed Gilbert, while Bella, scarcely knowing why, burst into tears and hid her head on Mrs. Pooley's ample shoulder.

'Yes, it is too awful. So is Payn, the bo'sun, attacked.'

'My God!'

And now Mrs. Pooley's fortitude gave way too, and she sobbed quietly to herself until, recognising that two tearful women were scarcely in their proper place in the saloon with these young men, she rose, and, taking Bella with her, they went off to their cabins.

'The watch, of course,' went on Charke, 'is nothing now with the ship at a standstill. Yet one has to keep it more or less. Fagg's turn would have been the middle of to-night, but if you like to fall in you can take the first, and I'll----'

'Thank you,' said Gilbert quietly, 'but I have done plenty of watch-keeping, both before and after I was a flag-lieutenant. The middle watch won't hurt me. I will relieve you at midnight.'

'As you like. Of course, the skipper and I recognise that it is a great obligation on your part----'

'Oh, rubbish! We are absolutely and literally "all in the same boat" now, and we've got to make the best of it.' Then Gilbert rose and said: 'By the way, I should like to go and see that poor chap, Fagg, if he is in his cabin. He's a nice young fellow.'

'He is, and a good sailor, though he doesn't make any fuss. Lord knows what's going to be the end of it all. I hope to Heaven those who are struck won't go the way of those niggers, and that their sight will come back before long.'

'I hope so, too; or else this will be one of the most awful calamities that ever fell upon any ship on a voyage. And the worst is, no one knows what the end is to be.' Then he turned on his heel and moved away with the intention of going to Fagg's cabin, while Charke, who was now half-way through his supper, went on steadily with it; yet, as Gilbert reached the gangway outside, the other made a further remark.

'By-the-by,' he said, 'another strange thing has happened. That infernal tiger-cub of Miss Waldron's--her pet!--seems going the same way as the others. It is crawling about the foredeck in a half-blind fashion, and evidently can't see signs made before its eyes. As far as the little beast goes, I shouldn't mind seeing it fall through one of the scuppers back into the sea it was dragged out of. It was rather rubbish to save it at all!'

The words 'that infernal tiger-cub of Miss Waldron's' grated somewhat on Gilbert's feelings, as did also the brutality of the remark about its falling into the sea. Why this was so he did not know, unless it was that he had seen the interest Bella took in the little creature, and in feeding it and calling every one's attention to the extraordinary manner in which it seemed to grow almost hourly. Nevertheless, the observation did grate on him, and he began to tell himself that he did not care much for Stephen Charke. However, like a good many other young naval officers, he had thoroughly learnt the excellent system of controlling his thoughts in silence, wherefore, without making any further remark than saying that he was sorry to hear about 'Bengalee,' he went on his way towards Mr. Fagg's cabin, leaving the first mate to finish his supper by himself.

He left him, also, to some strange meditations which, had they been uttered aloud in the presence of any listener, might have caused that person to imagine that he was the recipient of the babblings of a visionary. Put into words those musings would have taken some such form as this:--

'Supposing this malady or pestilence, or whatever it is, should be followed by madness and death, as was the case with the negroes. And supposing also that, among those who are struck, our friend Lieutenant Bampfyld--the future Lord D'Abernon!--should be one. What happens? Bella!--for so he dared to call her in his thoughts and to himself--Bella is deprived of him. Suppose, also, that the whole management of the ship falls into my hands; Pooley may be attacked, too--then--then--then----' But here his mental ramblings had to come to a conclusion, because, wild as his riotous thoughts were, his mind was clear enough to perceive that he was just as likely to be attacked by the blindness as was either Pooley or Bampfyld. While he saw very plainly that so, too, was Bella. And this pulled his meditations up with a jerk, since he could imagine nothing more horrible that could occur now than that the majority of all the men on board should remain sound and unstricken, and capable of working the *Emperor of the Moon* safely into some port or other, while the beautiful girl whom he worshipped and adored so much

should succumb to the hateful affliction.

'Oh, my God!' he almost moaned aloud, 'if-if she should be the next. If she should be taken and we left. How--how could I endure that?' And then, because he was a man with the best of impulses beneath all the gall which had arisen in his heart at losing the girl he had once hoped so much to win, he moaned once more: 'Not that--not that. Spare her, at least, Heaven! Spare her, even though I have to stand by and see him win her after all. Spare her! Spare her!'

CHAPTER XIV

STRUCK DOWN

But still the days went on and no wind came--the one thing which, even now, after they had been becalmed for nearly a week, might have saved the ship from any fearful calamity that was at last, almost without a doubt, in store for her. For, according to their reckonings, taken regularly both by aid of the brilliant sun which still poured down its vertical rays upon them, and also by the use of a cherub log which they possessed, as well as the ordinary ones, the current had drifted them some three hundred miles north, so that they had consequently the northern coast of Madagascar on their port bow, as well as the Aldabra Islands, and with Galega, Providence and Farquhar Islands almost directly ahead of them.

Only--the wind would not come, and the ship lay upon the water as motionless, except for the current, as though she had been fixed upon the solid and firm-set earth. And, meanwhile, the blindness which had seized upon one man after another was still continuing its progress, and more than half--indeed, three-parts--of the complement of the *Emperor of the Moon* were now sightless. Of seventeen sailors, eleven were down with this terrible, paralysing affliction, as well as one officer, Mr. Fagg; so that, if now the long-hoped-for breeze should spring up, there were scarcely enough men in the whole vessel to set the sails, even including Pooley--who certainly could not go aloft with safety!--and Charke and Gilbert; while, presuming all of them could do so and the wind should freshen much, they would undoubtedly be far from able to take them in again. And then the result must be swift--undoubted--deadly. The ship would rush to her destruction, would be beyond all control; she would either go over under the force of the elements, or be dashed to pieces on some solitary coral island which she might encounter in her mad, ungovernable flight. Consequently, there remained but one chance, and one only, for her, that chance being to forgo the advantage of the wind when it came at last, and to let her drift under bare poles until they were seen, and perhaps rescued, by a passing vessel. But, again there arose the fear in all hearts, as already it had done before--namely, would any other ship which might encounter them be willing to take on board men in such a plight as they were, and suffering from a disease that none could venture to doubt must be contagious?

Meantime, the life in the vessel itself was, possibly, the strangest form of existence which has prevailed for many a long sea-voyage. For she was subject to no stress whatever of weather, the elements were all in favour of her safety, if not her progress; she was comfortable and easy and well found with everything of the best--since, in the *Emperor of the Moon*, there was neither rotten pork nor weevily biscuits for old shellbacks to grumble and curse at and mutiny over, as those who wish to make the sailor dissatisfied with his lot are too often fond of representing to be the case--every one was well housed and well provided with good, wholesome food. Yet, all the same, she was a stricken ship--stricken, in truth, by the visitation of God; smitten by the hand of God with a curse which none could understand or explain. Fortunately, however--if the word Fortune may be used in connection with those now in her!--this curse seemed to have stopped at the blindness--though God knows that was bad enough! Death did not seem to be following after it, nor madness, nor delirium, as had been the case with the others--certainly as death had been. Those who were down lay in their berths, blind, it is true; but otherwise there was nothing else the matter with them; and, since they were ministered to by those who, up to now, had themselves escaped the visitation, they did not suffer in any other way.

Bella and Mrs. Pooley were at this time more or less in charge of the provisions, the latter dealing out the men's rations under the orders of her husband, while Bella, arrayed in a long white apron which gave her a charmingly strange appearance in the eyes of all who beheld her, attended to the meals of those who used the saloon, took her place in the cook's galley--the unfortunate man being one who was down with the scourge--and saw to all preparations necessary for their now hastily devised and uncomfortable meals.

'She's a good 'un,' the six remaining healthy men muttered to themselves, as they saw her busying herself about the ship, making soup and broth for them as well as for the after-cabin, and working indefatigably from morning to night on behalf of all on board, 'a real good 'un. And this here Navy lieutenant what's to marry her is a lord, ain't he, Bill?'

'He ain't a lord yet, but he's a-going to be. Ah, well; if we ever all gets safe into port, her ladyship will know summat about what her servants ought to be like. Her cooks won't get to windward of her in a hurry, I'll go bail!'

'If we ever get safely into port!' That was the sentiment which pervaded all minds on board the *Emperor of the Moon* at that time. 'If they ever got safely into port!' For all on board began now to doubt whether they would do so. The eighth day of their being becalmed had come, even as those fore-castle hands discussed the girl's goodness--with also, in whispers, many an admiring remark on her beauty and generally trim-built appearance--the eighth day had come and, suddenly, just as the forenoon watch was over, two more men suddenly called out together that they were 'struck'--were blind! Two more, leaving now only four sailors and three officers--counting Gilbert in place of Fagg--and two helpless women!

'Well,' said the chief mate, coming up to where Gilbert and Bella were discussing gravely this new affliction, while close by them the usual business was going on of getting the two fresh cases into their berths in the fore-castle--which was now a lazaretto--'well, this ends it. The wind may blow as much as it likes now, we shall never be able to make sail. We must drift about till we are picked up or----' Then, seeing the look of terror on Bella's face, he refrained from finishing his sentence, saying instead: 'If we had as many hands to do one man's work as you have in Her Majesty's service, Lieutenant Bampfyld, we should still be all right.'

'I don't know,' Gilbert replied coldly, and in a manner which, quite unknown to himself, he had been gradually adopting of late towards his unsuspected, would-be rival. 'I don't know. We may have a dozen hands to do one man's work in our service, as you seem to suggest, and as is often supposed, yet, all the same, I'd back four of our men and two young officers to get a lot of sail on a ship of this size, anyhow!'

'They might. Yet, clever as they are, you wouldn't like to back them for much to furl those sails again if the breeze freshened into a strong wind, would you?'

'I think so,' said Gilbert, still more coldly. 'At any rate, I'd back them to have a rare good try.'

'Try!' exclaimed Charke. 'Try! Oh, we can all try! As far as that goes, I'd have all the blind ones out to put their weight on the braces while the rest went aloft, if the wind would only come; they could do that without seeing. And we could try getting the sails off again if it blew too hard--but I doubt our doing it. Any one can try.' After which he walked forward to make inquiries about the two fresh cases of blindness.

'I don't like that man, Bella,' Gilbert said when the other was out of hearing, 'although he's a smart officer and a gentleman. And I don't think he likes me.'

For a moment she stood there saying nothing, and with her eyes cast down on the soft pitch of the seams, which was greasy and seething under the fierce sun. Then she looked up at her lover and said: 'No more do I much now, Bertie. In fact, I almost fear him.'

'I wonder if he was ever in love with you?' Bampfyld said, while remembering, as she spoke, how once, in those delicious days when they had first acknowledged their own love for one another, she had jokingly told him that he was not the first sailor who had tried to woo her. And he recalled, too, the fact that Charke had been introduced to her mother's house by her uncle, and had been more or less of a frequent visitor there. 'Was he, Bella?' he continued. 'Was he the sailor you once told me of who wanted your love?'

'Yes,' she said, gazing up at him with her clear, truthful eyes. 'He was. He told me so long after I met you. And I believe now--I have thought so for some time--that he would never have applied for the position he holds in this ship if uncle hadn't told him that I was coming in it. He was far too ambitious for such a post when I first knew him, and aspired to be captain in one of the great liners, and eventually to be an owner.'

'I'm glad you've told me, darling. Especially as it quite explains his not liking me over much. Poor chap! I can understand that he should not do so in the circumstances,' he added, while gazing down on his sweetheart with such a glowing look of love as to cause her to forget all their unfortunate surroundings and revel only in her delight at being so much beloved by him.

'Yet,' Gilbert continued, 'I can't understand his wanting to come into this ship, even though it would give him three or four months more of your society. Such a thing as that would have been maddening to ordinary men--I know it would have been to me! If you had rejected me--I--I--well, there! I can't say what I should have done; but, at any rate, I couldn't have borne the torture of being in your presence--especially if you were on your way to marry another fellow.'

'He is a strange man,' Bella said, 'and although I never loved him, I cannot help admiring his force of character. His father, a selfish old man, treated him badly and baulked him of going into your service, yet he managed to be a sailor in another way, and to enforce respect from every one. And he is a cultivated man and wonderfully well read. Still, I don't altogether like his force of character, or rather, the direction it takes. He told me, on that day at Portsmouth, that he never faltered in his purpose, and that, when once he had made up his mind to do a thing or get a thing, he did it, or got it, somehow. I believe, too, that he meant it as a kind of defiance to me.'

'Did he, though!' exclaimed Gilbert, as now they sat beneath the awning, at which they had arrived while talking. 'Did he! Well, he won't get you, anyway, will he? Not while I'm alive, anyhow. If, however, I were to die----'

But this remark was promptly hushed by Bella, who would not allow her lover to even finish it, and, as his watch commenced at six o'clock, he now went below to get an hour or so's rest before that time arrived, while she still sat on beneath the awning, thinking dreamily of him alone and of their future--if any lay before them, which now seemed doubtful, or, at least, very uncertain. Then, suddenly, as thus she mused, there happened a thing which startled and amazed her so that she sprang out of her Singapore chair and gazed aft, away down towards the south. A thing which even she, a landswoman, a girl originally unacquainted with anything connected with seafaring matters, had, by now, come to recognise and understand as vital to all on board that ship. She had felt the back of the straw hat she wore lifted by a slight warm ripple of air, while, at the same moment, some of the pages of a book she had left lying on the table were suddenly turned over swiftly and with a loud rustle.

'It is the breeze,' she muttered, 'the breeze! The wind at last!'

The others on deck had perceived it as quickly as she. At once, those who were about had sprung into action and thrown off the listlessness which had pervaded all in the ship since they had been becalmed. In an instant all was bustle and confusion; the four remaining men who could see rushing about eagerly. The master came out from where he had been talking to some of the sufferers, while Charke, running along the waist, called out: 'Miss Waldron! Miss Waldron! Where is the lieutenant? We want his services now, at once. Perhaps he, too, can do as much as any of his own men could if we look alive.'

'I will fetch him directly,' Bella cried, full of excitement, and, swiftly, she ran down the companion to the saloon on her way to hammer on Gilbert's cabin-door and awaken him. But, as she reached the place she stopped, petrified almost and filled with a vague alarm at she scarcely knew what, while, at the same time, she smothered a shriek which rose to her lips, and exclaimed in its place: 'Bertie! Bertie! What is the matter?'

For she saw him standing by the saloon-table gazing at her, smiling even as he heard her loved voice, yet holding on to the edge with one hand while, with the other, he felt, as it seemed, cautiously before him. And again she cried: 'Bertie, what is it? What does it mean?'

Then she heard his voice saying: 'It means, darling, that I too am struck down. That I too am blind.'

CHAPTER XV

A LIGHT FROM THE PAST

Four seamen only left untouched by blindness now, and two officers, to work a ship of six hundred tons! How was it to be, how could it ever be, done? The task was hopeless, and so all recognised on board that unhappy, ill-omened ship, even as now the wind freshened and the bosom of the ocean became flecked with little white spits of foam, while the breeze, hot as the breath of a panting wolf, swept up from the south. A breeze hot now, though once it had been cool--glacial--as it left the icebergs of the Antarctic Circle.

What was to be done? they muttered now, as, together, the six unstricken men took counsel while they stood in the shade of the foredeck awning, and forgot, in their excitement, that one was the master and owner, the other the first officer, and the four remaining ones only poor, ignorant sailors. What! what! what!

'I,' exclaimed Pooley, at last, after much discussion, 'can at least steer her. Some one must do it if she is to move at all; otherwise, in spite of my seventeen stone, I would be up those ratlins like a boy. But, even then, of what use are five to fist all the canvas she can carry?'

'We can fist some of it, at any rate,' said Charke, strong, determined as ever. 'By Heaven!' he cried, 'Lieutenant Bampfyld shall never go back to any of Her Majesty's ships and say that half-a-dozen men under the red ensign couldn't do something; couldn't make one stroke to save themselves!' Then, in an instant, he asked the captain to go to the wheel, while he sent the man, whose trick it was, forward, and, a second later, he was issuing orders to his subordinates.

Somehow, these orders were obeyed, and in about an hour, during which time all worked with a will and as if their lives depended on it, the *Emperor of the Moon* was under close-reefed topsails, foresail and fore-topmast staysail, when, if she had only had her full complement of able-

bodied men to do the necessary work, she might well have been under full sail before the still increasing wind, and making a good nine or ten knots an hour. But, now, that was impossible; even if those five could have got all her canvas on her the thing would have been madness. A little further increase of force in the wind, and they would at once have to shorten sail again--which, in the circumstances, it would be almost impossible for them to do--or to stand by and see the masts jumped out or blown overboard. As it was, the *Emperor*, under the combined power of the current and what wind they could avail themselves of, was making something like five knots an hour.

During all this time Bella had been below with Gilbert and a prey to terrible anguish, yet endeavouring in every way to cheer and solace him and to thrust her own fears and forebodings into the background. Fears and forebodings of she scarcely knew what, yet fears that were, all the same, assuming by degrees a more or less tangible shape. For of late--indeed, long since--there had been intensifying more and more in her mind that feeling of dislike and mistrust of Stephen Charke which she had experienced from the first moment that she had discovered him to be the second in command of the vessel in which she was to make so long a voyage; for, over and over again, she had remembered, had recalled, how he had said that he was never baulked in the end of what he desired to obtain, and that if he wanted a thing he generally managed to get it. And she knew that he had meant it as a warning, if not a threat; though, certainly, since that miracle had happened which had brought her lover into the very ship which was taking her to India and to him, she had laughed at, had inwardly despised, the threat, if it was one.

But now--now! With Gilbert stricken down by her side, helpless, crippled by blindness, unable to do aught for himself or her, and with her uncle broken down and worn almost to equal helplessness with his enforced labour and his despair at the ruin which threatened him through the probable destruction of his ship, what--what might not Charke do? *He* was not blind yet, nor--

Then, as her meditations reached this point, and while Gilbert sat by her side on the pretty plush-covered locker with his head on her shoulder, he broke in on those meditations, and what he said could not by any possibility be construed by her as helping to dispel them, but, rather, indeed, to aggravate them. 'At the rate we have been going on,' he said, 'since I came aboard, there will not be a living soul left with their eyesight by the end of the next two or three days. Oh, my God! Bella, what will it be like when this ship is at the mercy of the ocean, with every person on board blind.'

'Don't let us think about it, darling. Don't, don't! And even now some may retain their sight. Uncle, I, Mr. Charke, the men----'

'Ah,' he said, 'Charke; yes, Charke. Excepting you, dearest, I would sooner Charke kept his sight than almost any one else.'

'Why?' she asked, thinking that of all who were in the ship she, perhaps, cared less whether Charke preserved his sight or not.

'Think what a strong, self-confident man he is. Even if all the others were blinded and he was not, he would devise something for keeping the vessel afloat, though, of course, he could not work her. He would manage to get us all taken off somehow.'

This, the girl acknowledged, not only to him but herself, was true enough. As regarded Charke's sailor-like self-confidence, courage and determination, as well as how to do everything best that was necessary in the most sudden emergency, there was nobody on board the ship, nor ever had been, who was superior, or even equal, to him. Yet--in sole command and possession of that ship, supposing the other inhabitants of her should also be attacked with blindness and helplessness--what might he not do, if his dogged resolution never to be baulked of anything he had set his mind upon was allowed full sway? Her imagination was not a tragic one, nor more romantic than that of most young women who had been brought up as she had been, yet--yet--she shuddered at fears which were almost without actual shape in her thoughts. With all the others blind, herself included; with none to observe what Charke did; with the opportunity of removing for ever from his path any who had crossed it--of removing the one whom she felt sure, whom she *divined*, he was anxious to remove; with an open sea around him----'Oh, God!' she broke off, while exclaiming to herself, even as her reflections shaped themselves thus, 'never--never will I believe it. Never will I think so basely of any man, especially since he has given me no cause to do so. And, as yet, there are plenty left with their eyesight; plenty to see what is going on.'

Her uncle and aunt came into the saloon now, full of a distress that was visibly marked upon both their faces as well as their demeanour, yet both as kindly as ever in their manner, and uttering expressions of sympathy with Gilbert in his affliction. But, all the same, Bella could not but observe the look of absolute illness and grief on Captain Pooley's countenance, nor help trembling inwardly at the fear that he might be the next one attacked.

Nevertheless, he said cheerfully enough, after he had exhausted his condolences with the young man: 'We are doing some good now, at any rate. The "cherub" is marking about six knots; if the wind keeps where and as it is we may yet fetch Mahe, or one of the other Seychelles. In fact, we must reach them, or some other place, or----'

'Or what?' asked Bella, looking at him with tear-laden eyes.

'Or,' her uncle said, not, however, concluding his speech as he had originally meant to do, 'or drift about until we fall in with another vessel. We ought to do that, too,' he continued, 'for we are almost in the direct track from the Red Sea to Australia; we are in the track of the big liners.'

'How,' asked Gilbert now, while forcing a smile to his face as he spoke, although it was but a poor, wan substitute for the bright, joyous one that generally lit up his countenance--and, indeed, it was only assumed with the hope of cheering his sweetheart by his side, wherefore, like all other substitutes for the real thing, it was but a wretched copy--'how are my brother-sufferers? It would be cheering news to hear that some of them were regaining their sight.'

'At present,' Pooley replied, 'only one of your "fellow-sufferers" seems to be doing so, and that's not a human being but no other than Bella's *protégé* the tiger-cub. That creature is, we all believe, coming round. It is rambling about the deck by itself, but it undoubtedly can see now to avoid hitting its head against the raffle lying there. However,' he went on, 'here's a little information which you may both be glad of, upon which he dropped his hand into his nankeen jacket and produced from it an old, dirty, and much-thumbed book, on which, in addition to many other unclean marks and stains, were added droppings from candles.' It was evidently, as Bella at once divined, one which had been pored over at night; while, had she been well acquainted with the habits of those who dwelt in the fore-castle, she would have also understood that mercantile Jack is often in the habit of sticking lighted bits of candle about whenever he wants to read, and even to the sides of his bunk in which he lies, when he sleeps in one instead of in a hammock.

'Millett,' her uncle went on, naming one of the men who had still retained his eyesight, 'showed me this an hour ago. It belongs to poor Wilks, and is a book entitled *Calamities of Sailors*, it being a collection of odds and ends accumulated from various writers by an unknown hand. Now, here,' he went on, 'is a strange account of blindness attacking a vessel in much the same way as those in my poor old *Emperor* have been attacked, and----'

'Did they regain their sight?' exclaimed his listeners together; all three, namely, Mrs. Pooley, Gilbert, and Bella, asking the same question in almost the same words.

'They did,' the master went on, 'in this case. It happened on board the *James Simpson*, in 1803. But in another, I am sorry to say, they did not; and also, I am sorry to say, this is a very circumstantial account, given by M. Benjamin Constant to the French Chamber of Deputies, in 1820, when he was speaking on the horrors of the West African slave trade. He tells how a French ship, *Le Rôdeur*, having a crew of twenty-two men and a hundred and sixty slaves, left Bonny in 1819, and was attacked with almost precisely the same blindness which has now fallen on most of us. Things were worse with them than in this ship, however. They had scarcely any water, the air below was horribly impure, and, when the poor wretched slaves were allowed on deck, they locked themselves in each other's arms and leaped overboard in their agony, so that the French captain ordered some of them to be shot as a warning.'

'Yet,' exclaimed Gilbert, '*Le Rôdeur* must have got safely into harbour at last, or M. Constant would not have given his information.'

'Yes,' said Pooley, 'that of course is so. Pray God we do, too'; whereon he closed the book and dropped it into his pocket.

It was well he should do so. Well, too, that Bella did not ask to be allowed to read it for herself, for it contained a good deal more than her uncle had thought fit to read out, and described further horrors which it was not advisable that any in that saloon should be made acquainted with.^[1]

CHAPTER XVI

MAN OVERBOARD

Another day had passed and the south wind still blew gently, neither increasing nor decreasing in force, so that the log showed that the *Emperor of the Moon* had progressed between a hundred and fifty and two hundred miles farther north. Farther north, as all said now, but not to Bombay, since they had abandoned all hope of reaching that port in their present short-handed condition, and without obtaining fresh assistance--but towards the Seychelles. That was the harbour of refuge to which their thoughts and aspirations pointed at this time; the spot where, even though they should obtain nothing else, they would at least be in safety, and the one from which they could be taken off by some other ship if they were not able to find the means of working their own.

But, even as this day was drawing towards its conclusion--a day hotter, it seemed to all on board, than any they had previously experienced, and when neither the awnings nor the breeze that came aft protected them sufficiently to allow of their being on deck, unless duty demanded that they should be there--a change was perceived to have taken place in the condition of one or two who had been attacked by blindness. Mr. Fagg had declared that he was regaining his sight, and that, although he could not distinguish small objects with any amount of clearness, he was nevertheless able to see large things, such as the form of a man or woman, in a blurred, indistinct manner if he or she happened to enter his cabin; while Wilks averred that his sight was also returning rapidly to him.

'For, see here, sir,' he said to Charke, who, learning what was happening, or said to be happening, had gone forward to question him on the subject, 'I can walk aft to the break of the poop without stumbling against anything or over anything either. May I show you, sir?'

'Ay,' replied Charke. 'Show me. Let's see what you can really do,' while at the same time he motioned to a sailor, who happened to be by the mizzen-mast, to throw down gently a coil of rope he held in his hand so that, when Wilks neared the spot where it was, they would be able to observe whether he could see clearly enough to avoid it or not.

Meanwhile, Wilks, having received the necessary permission, had started from close by the fife-rail, where the conversation had been going on, and was making it perfectly clear that what he had stated was undoubtedly the truth. For, independently of the coil which the sailor had deposited abreast of the mizzen-mast, there was at this moment a good deal of raffle lying about the deck, as well as a bucket or so, and also a squeegee alongside the saloon skylight. But Wilks saw them all and steered himself along, avoiding each and every object both great and small, while, when he approached the coil of cable, he passed round it in almost precisely the same manner that a man in possession of his ordinary eyesight would have done. Then he looked back--at least he turned his face back--towards where he had started from, and, with a gratified grin on his countenance, asked Charke if he was not all right.

'Yes,' replied Charke, 'or getting so. If one or two more of your mates would only recover in the same way, we might bend another sail and, so, make a few more knots. Yet, curse it!' he muttered to himself, 'as one gets well another gets ill.'

This was unhappily only too true, for not an hour before he had been called to observe that Wilks seemed to be on a fair way towards recovery, he had learnt that Pooley was, although not stricken with the blindness, yet rapidly becoming blind. He had himself discovered such to be the case when, after lying down for an hour, he had been unable to perceive anything clearly on awakening. And, in another hour after this had been found by him to be the case, he was obliged to acknowledge his darkness of vision was becoming more intense, and that he feared his sight would be entirely gone by nightfall.

This was, perhaps, the greatest blow of all to several on board the unfortunate ship; on Bella it fell with overwhelming force. For now she recognised that, of all others, the very man she most feared and dreaded--though she could not have explained why that dread should have taken possession of her--was in absolute control over the ship, and could indeed do what he liked with it. Her uncle, she understood, could of course still issue orders, but--how was it to be known that those orders were being obeyed?

Then, strong-minded as she was, and feeling more so, as well as more self-possessed because of the presence of her lover in the ship, she again forced herself to discard such miserable and--as she termed them in her own mind--ridiculous fears, and set herself about the task which had now for some time developed on her of attending to the catering of the ship and looking after the sufferers generally. For, from Mrs. Pooley, Bella had not at any time received much assistance, owing to the fact of the poor lady having been quite ill since the calamities on board began to follow each other in such frequent succession, while, now that her husband was struck down, she appeared to have collapsed altogether. Indeed, at this present time, she was doing nothing except lying on the plush-covered sofa of the saloon, while moaning feebly that they were all doomed, and that, even if the ship was not utterly cast away and lost, there would soon not be a living soul on board who would be able to see.

'And then,' she sobbed, 'what can happen to a vessel--in the night, especially--full of men and women who are all blind and cannot find their way from one end of the deck to another?'

'Nonsense, aunty, dear, nonsense!' Bella replied, while endeavouring bravely to dispel her aunt's forebodings, which, in solemn truth, she shared to the full with her, though not for worlds would she acknowledge that she did so. 'Are not some already getting well--Mr. Fagg, and the sailor, Wilks, and Bengalee----'

'While at the same time others succumb to the blindness,' Mrs. Pooley interjected, still with a moan. 'And now your poor uncle, of all others.'

'Well,' said Bella, still stout of heart, 'we have this comfort: it soon passes away. Let me see. Bengalee has been blind about a fortnight, Wilks and Mr. Fagg about twelve days--whatever is that noise!' she exclaimed, breaking off suddenly.

As she uttered that exclamation there had come a sudden racket above their heads, the noise descending through the wide-open skylight. A noise which seemed first like the yelp of a dog in pain; then another which resembled somewhat the spitting of a cat, followed by a shrieking kind of growl, and then the voice of Charke exclaiming angrily: 'I'll have the infernal thing thrown overboard. Here you, catch hold of it--make a loop and fling it over its neck. Catch it, one of you!'

'Oh!' cried Bella, forgetting everything else for the moment, and rushing towards the companion, 'it's Bengalee!' Then she swiftly ran up to the deck, and saw the tiger-cub standing close up by the frame of the skylight and growling at Charke, whom it regarded with terribly vicious eyes. And she noticed, too, that it held up one of its hind legs as though it were injured.

'What are you doing to the creature?' she cried. 'You have been kicking it again, you----' she was going to say 'brute,' but restrained herself. 'And you shall not have it thrown overboard, as I heard you order the men to do!' she continued. Then she went towards the creature perfectly fearlessly, and spoke to it, and eventually stroked its back, so that at last its growls subsided altogether.

The chief mate's face had presented an appearance of scowling rage as she reached the deck, while it had on it an expression that boded ill for any extended existence being accorded to Bengalee had she not appeared at the moment she did. Yet, by the time she had ceased petting the animal he had managed to control himself considerably, and to smooth out the look of temper from his countenance. And now he said:

'Oh, of course I did not really mean to do that, Miss Waldron. Though it will have to be got rid of eventually. It is impossible that it can be kept much longer. And, you know, we have enough work to do without attending to such an animal as this. Just think! I am the only officer fit for duty, and I have only four able men to work with--since Wilks cannot be called well yet.'

Honestly, Bella felt sorry that she had spoken as hotly as she had done, since she did indeed recognise the almost superhuman amount of work that had fallen on Charke's shoulders just now. He seemed never to sleep but was on deck night and day, sometimes steering, sometimes even going aloft alone, and hardly ever snatching a quarter of an hour for his hasty meals. She murmured, therefore, some words of regret, and was going on to say how sorry she was for having been excited, when he stopped her.

'No, no, Miss Waldron. It was nothing--nothing. The thing did spring at me angrily as I passed where it was sleeping, and I kicked it. I am sorry, too. And you know I would not injure anything you liked,' while, as he spoke, he bent his dark, handsome eyes on her.

Perhaps it was a pity he uttered these last words, since in her own heart she did not believe that they were true. She had seen his glances more than once directed at Gilbert when he had not known that she was observing him, and she thoroughly believed that, in them, there was a malignant look, a look of hatred, which belied his words. And she had seen--she *thought* she had seen--something else in those glances when Gilbert was first attacked with blindness which, if not gloating, was very like it. She said, therefore, now, as she turned towards the ladder: 'Then you won't punish it, Mr. Charke, will you? You won't let it be thrown overboard in any circumstances, will you?'

'It shall be as sacred to me as you are,' he replied. 'Its life as sacred as yours.'

But all the same, she told herself as she went back to the saloon, that, if there was anything Charke hated in that ship, or rather, any two things he hated more than all else, those things were her lover and Bengalee.

Presently, not ten minutes later, she again heard his voice, calling out loudly to one of the men this time: 'If we could only get another on her we could make two more knots, I believe. If only some of those who are blind but not otherwise incapacitated would help on the braces and get the yards round, we could do it.'

She was not the only person who heard these words. Not a moment had they left his lips before the curtains in front of Gilbert's and Mr. Fagg's cabins were pushed swiftly back with a metallic jangle, as the rings ran along the rod, and each of the young men appeared in the saloon and began making his way guided by his hands, towards the stairs leading up to the deck.

'Oh!' cried Bella, not quite understanding what it was Charke wanted done, or what assistance could be rendered by persons who were blind, 'what are you going to do? Gilbert, don't do anything rash! Nor you, Mr. Fagg!' though she saw by their faces and the smile that came to each that she had overrated any harm that was possible.

'We'll get that sail on,' exclaimed Gilbert, as he felt his way up the stairs, and Fagg said: 'We will so,' as he followed him after they had each jostled the other at the foot in a slight collision which their sightlessness had caused, and, a moment afterwards, Bella and Mrs. Pooley were left alone in the cabin. Yet they could hear, plainly enough, the words of approval bestowed on Gilbert and Fagg for their promptness, when the meaning of it was recognised by those on deck; and they caught, too, the orders bawled with great rapidity by Charke the instant he had received this extra assistance. Also, they heard him ordering one man to the starboard main braces and another to go forward and loose the jib.

A moment later they heard something else as well.

The cry of two or three voices together, the roar of Charke, and then his trumpet-tones, exclaiming:

'My God! he's overboard!'

And Bella, with the image of one man alone in her mind, reeled backwards towards the sofa where Mrs. Pooley lay, and gradually slid, fainting, on to the cabin floor by her side.

CHAPTER XVII

'FAREWELL, MY RIVAL'

Had Bella known more about a ship and its intricacies she would have understood that, notwithstanding some one had undoubtedly gone overboard, the sailor, whoever he was, could not by any possibility have been one of those who had gone to help in squaring the yards. Instead, she would have been aware that such an accident could only have happened to some seaman who had either gone aloft or out on to the jib-boom. And, in fact, the latter was the case; the unfortunate fellow, a man named Brown, falling off the boom while endeavouring to set the flying jib, and being struck a moment later by the frame timbers forward as he fell. Yet the unhappy sailor seemed still to have some life left in him, as those who rushed to the port side could see, since, as he was passed by the ship, he was observed to rise to the surface--his head all shiny with blood--and to strike out manfully. But what could that avail, since, by the time the *Emperor* could be brought to the wind and a life-buoy thrown overboard, he was half a mile astern? To lower the boats in time to save him would also have been an impossibility, even if it could have been done at all; and, moreover, the swift-coming instantaneous darkness of the equator was at hand, so that the man himself was, by now, almost invisible.

'Steer her course again,' Charke called out, therefore, to the man who was at the wheel, in a voice in which regret for the unfortunate sailor was mingled with a tone denoting some other sentiment that, perhaps, none would have been able to understand, even though they had been swift to observe it, as, in their excitement, none were. Then, at once, in a few moments, the *Emperor of the Moon* was again heading towards where the Seychelles lay.

What was that other sentiment which now pervaded the breast of this strong, masterful sailor; this man who had worked untiringly for hour after hour on stretch, and who seemed to rise triumphant over Nature's command that both sleep and meals should be properly partaken of? The man who had not changed his clothes for three days, nor even had them off his back when he sought a quarter of an hour's rest here or ten minutes there? What was this sentiment? Nothing but a certainty that this was the last voyage the ship was ever to make--a feeling of intense conviction, which had been growing upon him for some time, that all in the ship were doomed. For he, at least, could see--*he* was not blind yet--and, more than all else on board, perhaps, could feel; and his sight showed him things over the water, in the density of the atmosphere, even in the appearance of the brassy heavens above, which told him that, ere long, the slight whispering breeze which blew would be changed into a hurricane howling across the ocean. His feelings, his nerves, the moisture of his skin corroborated, also, what his sight proclaimed.

'It will come,' he muttered to himself, as now he paced the after-deck, with his eyes never off the light sail that the ship was carrying. 'It will come soon, and then we are done for, even though I get every inch of canvas off her first. This man's death leaves me and three other sailors as the only persons to work the ship. It is strange if, even under bare poles, we continue to swim.'

Then, as he turned his head towards where Bella (who had soon recovered from her faintness) was now standing talking with her uncle and her lover, he muttered another sentence to himself--a sentence which, should a romancist or a dramatist inspire one of his characters with it, would, perhaps, be deemed unnatural, yet which this man of iron will and fierce determination muttered to himself as calmly as he would have given an order to one of his few remaining sailors.

'If it blows, as I believe it will, twenty-four hours will see the end of us all. She--oh, my God! she will be dead--but so will he and so shall I. Well, there's consolation in that. If I can't have her, no more can he. That thought makes the end mighty cheap.'

Here he strode towards those three standing by the break of the poop, and touching his cap to Bella--he was, as she had observed, a gentleman, and in all that became the outward semblance of a gentleman he never failed--he said quietly to the poor, blind captain standing by her side with his fingers resting lightly on her arm:

'We must get in all the sail, sir, now. There is a change coming; I know it--feel it. The glass, too, stands very low, and since we cannot work the ship in a storm, short-handed as we are, we had better commence at once. It will be pitch dark in ten minutes and there is no moon.'

'Good God!' exclaimed Pooley, 'what is to happen next? The glass low, you say? Well, that means a change of some sort, though not necessarily bad weather. What are these feelings you speak of, Charke?'

'The feelings of a sailor,' he replied. 'You know them as well as I do. Ha!' he exclaimed, 'there's lightning in the south. No time to be lost.'

Then he seized the boatswain's whistle, which he had hung round his neck and used since the man himself had become disabled, and blew it as a signal to his three remaining hands to be ready for his orders.

'Now then,' he cried, 'up with you and stow the few sails that there are. What do you say?'--to one who muttered something--'tired--been working all day? Why, damn you! haven't I been working too.' Charke rarely swore, but he was impelled to do so now, especially as he had moved out of Bella's hearing. 'Do you see that lightning down there in the south? Do you want the ship to be blown over and go to the bottom in her? Here, you stop at the wheel,' addressing the man who was already at it, 'we others can do it somehow. Follow me'; and away he went to the topsail yard, selecting the most arduous part of the business for himself. While he muttered to himself as he did so: 'Now, if I should go, too--fall off the yard--they are doomed beyond all help. Nothing then can save him.' Which thought caused a strange, weird kind of smile to be on his face as he sprang up the ratlins.

And, stirred to action by his own indomitable energy, the men did set about the work and managed it somehow, the sails being stowed in a very unshipshape fashion (or what would have been an unshipshape fashion if the proper quantity of sailors had been there to do the job) and in such a manner that the first gust of the coming tempest would be as likely as not to blow them clean off their lashings. Still, it was done at last, and not too soon either, since, ere they had concluded their work, the lightning was flashing incessantly and huge drops of rain were falling.

'It's a south-easterly wind,' said Gilbert to Bella, turning his cheek towards it. 'Where will it blow us to now?'

Charke thought he knew, as he listened to the remarks, since he had returned to their vicinity after coming down from the topsail-yard, but he uttered never a word. Even now he loved the girl by their side too much to frighten her more than was necessary. Yet, had he said that he knew that, short of a miracle, it must be the bottom of the ocean--as was the case--she would probably not have heard him, since, at this moment, with a devilish shriek, the gale was upon them. Upon them and almost pooping the ship as it struck her right aft, and then driving her forward in the churned sea with a horrible, sickening motion, while, since she was fairly deeply laden, she recovered herself from the avalanche of water but slowly. An avalanche that, sweeping over the poop with a roar and a swish, took Bella and Gilbert off their feet and hurled them forward staggering, and buffeted against each other.

'Below--go below, all of you!' roared Charke to them, and also to Pooley, who had himself been sent sliding along the deck and was now hanging on to a belaying-pin, even as he called out to know where Bella was. 'Below, I say! We must close the hatches, or she will have the sea in her. Below, quick!' and, rushing towards Bella, he led her to the after-companion, dragging Gilbert with his other hand and returning for Pooley. And now the tropical lightning--that violet-hued lightning which is so beautiful and also so sure a sign of awful turbulence in the elements--played incessantly on the ill-starred *Emperor of the Moon*; the seas were mountains at one moment, valleys at another. The ship, too, was rolling so that it seemed as if everything on her deck must be pitched off her into the sea--as was indeed the case with many of the smaller things which went to form the raffle lying all about--and each time that she went over to port or starboard she took tons of water over her side. Then, a still more gigantic wave caught her on her port-bow, and absolutely threw her up, it rolling directly afterwards under her counter and letting her drop directly afterwards into the trough, while over her poop, again, came that which seemed to be not a wave but the whole Indian Ocean itself.

Amidst it all Charke still stood at the wheel, holding on to it as perhaps few solitary men had ever held on to a wheel in such a sea before; his arms actually bars of iron, yet appearing to him as though deprived of all sense and feeling. He stood there silent, determined, resolved, awaiting death, knowing that it must come and not dismayed--because it must come to that other, too, that man below in the saloon who loved and was beloved by Bella. Then, suddenly, he knew that he was not to die there alone at his post while his rival expired in his sweetheart's arms, or she in his; he knew--he discovered that not to him alone was to belong all the bravery and the resolution.

Creeping up from below, thanking God that the hatch had not yet been closed, feeling his way by his hands and gradually reaching the wheel--buffeted here and there; knocked down once, then up again--Gilbert Bampfyld crept to his side, and, an instant later, was fingering and, next, gripping the spokes.

'Let me help you!' he roared, so as to be heard, while feeling as he did so which way the other man who already had hold of the wheel was exerting his force. 'Blind as I am, I can do that. Who are you?'

'Stephen Charke,' the other answered, also shrieking his name. 'Help, if you like. But it is useless. We are going.'

'I know it,' Gilbert answered. 'Well! we will go down standing.'

And Charke, still endeavouring to hold up the ship, still to protract life from one moment to another, muttering inwardly: 'Curse him! he is a man. One worthy of her.' Then, unceasingly, he continued his work, wrenching, striving, endeavouring in every way to save the ship from being pooped or flung over as the waves took her and cast her up like a ball, or hurled her down like a falling house into the gaping, hellish troughs that lay below, yawning for their victim.

But still the lightning played upon the doomed craft, illuminating her from stem to stern, showing the fore top-gallant mast gone and the jib-boom carried away, broken off short, three feet from the bowsprit head. Also it showed something else--something that, had he had time to think of aught but preventing the ship from falling off the course he was endeavouring to steer, might have struck a feeling of wild horror to his uncanny breast.

For some of the blind, stricken men forward had crept by now out of the forecabin and other places where they had herded, and were crawling about the foredeck, holding on to whatever they could clutch--belaying-pins, the fife-rail, the racks, even the ring-bolts. Amongst them, too, was the tiger-cub, an almost unrecognisable lump, except for the topaz gleam which his eyes emitted: a gleam that, as a sea, which was in truth a cataract, washed it from the foremast almost to where he stood, appeared to Charke malignant, devilish, threatening. And he heard those unhappy men's voices, cursing, blaspheming, praying: roaring that they feared no death which they could see, but that they wanted to go neither to heaven nor hell enveloped in utter darkness.

'No Jack who ever sailed,' they screamed, 'feared a death that he could face, but we fear this. And if we had but our sight, maybe there'd be no death at all!'

'Ay, but there would, though,' muttered Charke to himself--'there would. Ha! by God, look there,' he cried aloud, forgetting that the only man who could hear his words was blind. The ship had given another hideous plunge--had wrenched herself as a giant might give a wrench in endeavouring to free himself from the chains that bound him--then down! down! down! she went into the hollows of the ocean, so that up above her on either side were nothing but vast walls of sea. Walls that would, that must close together, Charke understood, fifty feet above their heads, leaving the ship beneath them. And then he turned to the other man by his side, saying calmly: 'Now is the time! You love Bella Waldron. So do I. And neither of us will ever set eyes on her again. Farewell--my rival!'

CHAPTER XVIII

'SHE WILL NEVER KNOW'

'How in Heaven's name has she ever done it?' muttered Charke to himself, three minutes later, as, dripping like a dog dragged out of a pond, he still stood by the wheel while holding on like a vice to the spokes. And still both he and Gilbert had each got their legs twisted in the radii to prevent them from slipping, since now the ship lay over frightfully to starboard and did not recover herself at all. 'Ah, well,' he continued, 'it does not matter much how. Another five minutes and over she goes--turtle. It is a hundred to one she has six feet of water below.'

How had she done it? That was the wonder, the marvel; the more especially a wonder if, as Charke thought, she had six feet of water in her, since twice that amount would have taken her to the bottom even though she lay in the most tranquil waters of the universe. It was impossible she would have risen again, if overloaded thus. Yet, water in her or not, she had accomplished a marvellous feat for any craft that ever left the shipbuilder's yard. For, from down below in those awful depths, with, on either side of her, and glistening all around her in the glare of the lightning like the sides of a crevasse, those walls of sea, she had still risen above them and had (a moment or so after they seemed to be closing in on her and shutting her out for ever from the world above) been once more poised on the crest of a huge billow. She had done it, and now lay listing over on to her starboard side, as some great wounded creature might do whose right ribs had all been broken in by the blows of a pole-axe. But still she travelled through the water in the darkness of the night; for now the lightning was ceasing and, also, she carried no lighted lantern since there were none to attend to such things--while, even though there had been, the beating of the gale would soon have extinguished them. She travelled swiftly, too, cutting her way through

billow and wave, taking in huge seas aft which swept her decks--yet going still. But with some of those spectral forms, those blind groping men, departed for ever; swept down the sloping deck by tons of water, down and over into the ocean. And of the few, the three who had still their sight, one lay with a broken neck at the foot of the foredeck companion-way, having been flung down the hatch-way head foremost; the other two were drunk. They had broken into the steward's room, where there were none to control them, and had found some bottles of beer, as well as one of brandy and one of rum--and this was the result!

At that moment the wheel spun round in Gilbert's hands, dragging him with it in its revolution, so that he thought he would have to let go or be thrown in a somersault over into the sea; then, as he forced it back, he heard Charke's voice bellowing at him:

'Can you hold her up for five minutes? I can grasp the spokes no more; I am done. I would not have let go like that, God knows I wouldn't, but I have lost all sensation in my arms and hands. I will lead Fagg out. Perhaps he can help.'

'I may hold her steady,' Gilbert answered, 'but no more. What can a blind, stricken man do?'

'It is enough,' Charke said. 'Sight would not aid you to do more, and, after all, it is of no use. We but prolong life for nothing. Yet, here goes.'

He made his way below, falling, sliding down the companion-ladder, tumbling along in the darkness to where he judged the door of Fagg's cabin was; he fell over things that had been hurled out of the steward's pantry on the port side--broken dishes, plates, tin utensils, potatoes peeled ready for cooking, and a joint of meat--he felt all these with his feet and benumbed hands, and found a bottle, too, which his smell told him was rum. Then he tore the cork out of it with his teeth and drained a tumblerful of the raw spirits. That gave him fresh life and energy; the blood coursed and danced through his veins again, his fingers began to feel, his arms to strengthen. Sliding back the door of Fagg's cabin he called him by name, and, receiving no answer, felt in the berth to see if he was there, while, even as he discovered that the bed was empty, he trod on an upturned face, and then stooped down and felt it and the head, and found the latter all broken. Whereby he understood what had happened to the unfortunate young officer, and knew that he had either been hurled out of his bed against a bulkhead, or, being out of it, had been dashed to death.

He would have gone back now to relieve Gilbert, and was turning to do so when his eye caught the glimmer of a light down the narrow gangway leading to the saloon, and he knew at once that somehow those within had managed to get the bracket-lamp over the table lit. Whereon he went towards that saloon, intent on seeing how those who were in it--especially *one* in it--were preparing to meet their end. Were they bearing up bravely? Was she--was that girl who maddened him, that girl, through his unrequited love for whom, he knew, he felt, that all his better qualities had been driven out of him--preparing to meet her death nobly, valiantly?

The sight he saw might have struck horror to a bolder, a better man than he. A sight more fitting to meet the eyes of one who gazed into a catacomb or charnel-house than into what had been, not long before, a pretty, bright saloon. Mrs. Pooley lay flat upon her back, moaning feebly, her stout body rolling backwards and forwards with every swing of the ship and every plunge it made. The captain was on his face, and above him lay half the debris of the shattered, sea-wrecked cabin.

But Bella! She frightened, startled him!

'The others may be dead,' he whispered, 'but she, surely she is alive. God! how her eyes stare, yet--yet how lovely she is still.'

The girl was sitting upright upon the saloon sofa, her hands gripping the head of it as though, all unconscious as she appeared to be, she still knew that she must do that to save herself from being flung down, and her lips moved faintly. Then he wrenched the bottle of rum from out of his pocket, he having put it there with a view to administering some to Gilbert when he regained the deck, rival though he was, and moistened her lips with it.

'Miss Waldron--Bella,' he whispered, allowing himself in those last moments the luxury of calling her by the name that he had whispered so often softly to himself. 'Bella! for God's sake, say something. Tell me that you are not dying.'

And she did whisper something--a word that he heard above all the roar of the hurricane thundering aloft, above the awful concussions of the ship's sides as again and again the tons of water struck at her, heavily, savagely, and as, also, she struck at them in her maimed progress; above even the rattle of ship's furniture rolling about, and the sickening thumps of the unlashed piano as it beat against the stem of the mizzen-mast. She whispered a word or so.

'Gilbert,' those white, cold lips muttered; 'Gilbert, my darling, we are dying together. Clasp me to your arms now. Hold me in them to the end.'

With a moan, not a curse!--a curse would not have availed or eased him now--he started back in that dim cabin, hurling the bottle from him as he did so. His rival! his rival! again, even now! His name the last word on her lips, his image the last thing present to her in the hour of death.

Then he fled from the cabin back again to his post, back to the wheel to which he swore he would lash himself, and so go down thinking of nothing but his duty. There was, his fevered mind told him, nothing but that--but his duty--left. As he went along he noticed, distraught though he was, that the vessel was making a kind of rotatory movement under him; that she seemed, indeed, to be gliding round and round in a circle although beaten back more than once by the awful force beneath her.

'He has left the wheel!' he cried, his swift and accurate seaman's knowledge and intelligence telling him at once what had happened. 'Is he mad--or dead?'

And clutching, grasping at everything that offered a hold to him, he forced himself back to where the wheel stood, only to find when there that Gilbert was lying senseless by it. Senseless but not dead, as one thrust of Charke's hand under the other's wet clothes, towards the region of the heart, told him very well. An instant later he had resumed his hold on the spokes, and was endeavouring to put the ship on her course before the howling winds, to keep her straight on into the dark, impenetrable depth of blackness ahead of her.

Again the marvel was that she did not go over, or did not suddenly sink beneath the weight of water that was pouring in on all sides--sink like a stone. And he began to tell himself now that, as she had borne up so long, as the storm could, by no possibility, become worse and must, at last, abate, there was still a hope. A hope of what? That he and Bella might both be saved; be saved, and saved alone, together. 'She is alive and I am alive. The others are dead, or dying. Oh, God! if she and I are spared----'

But that sentence was never finished!

For, as he partly uttered it there came an awful crash, a crash that hurled him back, then flung him over and over on the poop--a grinding, horrible concussion, followed by the most terrible thumps and by the sudden cessation of the ship's passage. And, a moment later, the vessel heeled over, though still beating and thumping heavily, so that now the water poured into her forwards, and, gradually, her fore-part was entirely immersed. But still the pounding and the awful grating continued, while growing worse and worse.

'She has struck,' he muttered to himself. 'Struck on a reef or a rock. The end has truly come.'

In a moment he had picked himself up from the poop-deck, and, difficult as it was to move with the vessel beating backwards and forwards, had dragged himself down to the saloon--down to where Bella was, the woman whom he would save or die with.

The lamp had gone out with the concussion. All was in darkness, and, above the roar of the tempest outside, he could hear the furniture beating about the saloon as the ship swayed and wrenched. Yet he went on towards where he had left her ten minutes before; on towards the sofa on which she had been sitting almost unconscious.

She was not there he found, but, instead, lying insensible at the foot of the sofa. Insensible, he knew, because, to his words, his summons, she returned no answer. Then, in a moment, he had seized her in his arms, had lifted her up, and, with her head upon his shoulder, was groping his way with unsteady, stumbling feet towards the gangway.

Her head upon his shoulder now, her hair brushing his face now, in this moment, in the hour of destruction--for one, for both of them! Her head upon his shoulder! And he a mortal man! It was beyond endurance; more than he could bear! Acknowledging this, recognising it, he slightly moved, with the hand which was around those shoulders, that face so close to him, that face so close, so cold and chill--and kissed her long and passionately.

'She will never know,' he muttered, 'never know. Yet--yet it has made death sweeter. Death! the death that will be ours ere many more moments have passed.'

Yet, near as that death was, so near as to be beyond all doubt, as much beyond all doubt as that the rocking, shivering ship was breaking up fast, he felt his way towards where he knew the life-buoys were, and rapidly fitted one on to each of them; while, as he did so, he murmured again and again:

'If any are saved it can only be she and I. Yet even of that there is no hope.'

CHAPTER XIX

'I ALMOST DREADED THIS MAN ONCE'

The Indian Ocean lay beneath the purple-scarlet rays of the setting sun as calmly and as peacefully as though, across its treacherous bosom, nothing more violent than a cat's-paw had ever swept. Indeed, so calm and peaceful was the spaceless sheet of cobalt that, almost, one might have thought he gazed upon some quiet tarn, or inland lake, shut in and warded off from any breeze that might blow or any tempest that could ever roar. Only--he who should stand upon the pebbly beach of a little island upon whose white stones the surf hissed gently as it receded slowly and faintly--as though it were asleep and languid--would have known that, for thousands of miles ahead of him, there was nothing to oppose the tempests of the east and south, or prevent them from lashing that now calm and placid ocean into madness, or from exerting their powers of awful destruction.

A little island set in that glittering, sapphire sea, with, all around its circumference of five miles, a belt of white bleached stone and sand, and with, inland and running up from the belt, green grassy slopes, in which grew tall palm trees, vast bushes or tufts of bananas, orange and lemon trees, mangoes and yams. There, too, were grassy dells through which limpid streams of pure cool water ran until they mingled with the salt ocean; there the wild turtle-dove cooed from guava and tamarind tree, the quails and guinea-fowls ran about upon the white silvery sands; while, to complete all these natural advantages, neither mosquito nor sandfly existed.

A little island girt by coral reefs--the ocean's teeth, strong, fierce, and jagged; teeth that can rip the copper sheathing off a belated vessel as easily as a man can rip the skin from off the island's pink and golden bananas; teeth that can thrust themselves a dozen or twenty feet into the bowels of forlorn and castaway barks and tear them all to pieces as the tusk of the 'must' elephant tears the bowels of its victims. A little island, one of a thousand in that sometimes smiling, sometimes devilish, sea--such as are in the Chagos Archipelago, or the Seychelles, or the Cormoras, and, like so many of those islands, untried, unvisited by man. Unvisited because, where all are equally and bounteously supplied by Nature, there is no need for any ship to draw near this solitary speck that is guarded from all approach by those belts of coral, and also because, to this small island, there is no natural harbour should rough winds blow.

Now--as still the setting sun went swiftly down amidst its regal panoply of purple and violet and crimson, while, above those hues, its rays shot forth great flecks and flames of amber gold--it was not uninhabited, not desolate of all human life. Upon a grassy slope a man lay, his head bound up with linen bands; one of his hands being swathed, too, in similar wrappings. And his eyes were closed as though he were sleeping--or dead. To her who gazed on him it seemed almost as if it must be the latter--the greater, the more everlasting sleep, that had fallen on him.

For there were two in this island now; she who thus looked down on the prostrate man being a woman clad in a long dress, which once had been of a soft, delicate white fabric, but, now, was stained and smeared with many splashes and marks, and was rough and crumpled with hard usage and by the effects of seawater. Her hair, too, was all dishevelled, uncombed and unbrushed; tossed up in a great mass upon her head; bound with a piece of ordinary tape. And still she was as beautiful as she had ever been; beautiful in this negligence which was the result of shipwreck and of battling with tempest, of cruel buffetings from merciless waves and jagged rocks--beautiful, though on her face and in her eyes was now the sombre beauty of a despair and misery too deep for words. For he whom she loved, he whose wife she was to have been, was not upon that island with them, and had no more been heard of since, in the arms of Stephen Charke, she had been plunged into the sea and, in those arms, borne to safety and to life.

She gazed down on him now, in the last glimmering beams of the golden light that shot athwart the island, while regarding him with some expression in her glance which caused that glance to be not altogether a reflex of her own misery and despair. An expression that seemed to denote a supreme pity, an almost divine regret for him who lay before, and beneath, her, in pain and suffering.

'How brave--how strong he was!' she murmured inwardly, her lips not moving. 'How he fought with that storm--fought with Death to save me and himself! No!' she broke off, still uttering her meditations to her own heart alone--'why do him such injustice even in my thoughts? It was not to save us both, but me alone. There was but one desire in his soul--to save me!'

She turned and went to a small heap of fruit that she had gathered earlier in the day, and selected one of the great pink bananas--pink with a lustrous beauty which those who only see them when they arrive in northern climes could never believe they have once possessed--then she took a scooped-out cocoanut shell, and, going to a little babbling rill that ran through the grassy defile, filled it with water. After which she returned to where the other lay, and, kneeling by his side, gazed on him again.

'My God!' she whispered. 'I almost dreaded him once. Feared him for I knew not what. Feared him! Him! And he has been my saviour.'

He seemed to know that she was by his side and near him; for, even as she murmured these words to herself, Stephen Charke opened his eyes--a faint smile appearing in them--and gazed into hers.

'You are better?' she asked, as she gave him the shell with the water in it, which he was not too weak to be able to take and raise to his lips, while she tore off the rind of the banana. 'Your

forehead,' she went on, while putting her hand upon it calmly, as a sister might, 'is cooler. Are you still in pain?'

'No,' he answered. 'No--only very weak. Are--are--any more saved from that?' and he directed his glance to where, two hundred yards off from the island, lay something protruding above the water which looked like the rounded back of a whale, but was, in truth, the torn and lacerated keel of the *Emperor of the Moon*. In her last struggles--in her last convulsions as the gale had hurled her on to the coral reef--she had turned almost completely over.

'No,' she replied, her face an awful picture of despair and anguish. 'None are saved but you and I. Oh!' and she buried that face in her hands and wept aloud, piteously, heartbrokenly.

'God rest their souls,' he said solemnly. 'God pity them! Why I, too, should have been spared except to save you, I do not know. I might as well have gone down with them.'

'No! no!' she cried. 'No, Mr. Charke. You must be spared for better days, for greater things. Oh,' she exclaimed, 'how bravely you battled with it all! Uncle told us,' she went on through her tears, 'when we were below and before I became insensible, that your efforts were superhuman; that, if the ship could be saved, it would be by you alone. And,' she continued, 'how you saved me I do not know. Only--only--I wish I had gone with him, with Gilbert.'

'Nay,' he said--'nay. Do not say that. And--and--I ask you to believe that, had it been possible, I would have saved him too. But it was impossible. Impossible to so much as slip a life-buoy over his shoulders. The end was at hand, the ship broken in half. It was impossible,' he repeated earnestly.

'How,' she asked, as she sat by his side gazing out across the calm, waveless sea through the fast-coming tropic night, and watching the great stars--almost as big as northern moons---sparkling, incandescent like, in the blue heavens above--'how did you do it? I remember nothing till I found myself lying there,' and she pointed down to the white sand, from which there came, through the sultry night, the gentle hiss of the sea, 'and saw you lying near me, and dead, as I thought.'

'Nor do I remember, or only very little more than you can do. I dragged you from the saloon, and, after fixing a life-buoy on to each of us, leaped into the sea with you, striking out vigorously to avoid the ship. And I can recall my battlings with the waves for a few moments--only a few--then feeling my breath knocked out of me. And, then, nothing more until I came to and found you looking at me here. It was the life-buoys that saved us.'

'In God's mercy. Under His Providence. Yet--yet--if it were not wicked to say so--if it were not for my poor dear mother at home--I--should----'

'No, no!' he almost moaned. 'No, no! Not that!' Then, after a moment or so of silence, he said: 'Do you know how long we have been here? Can you guess?'

'This is the second night, I suppose,' she answered. 'When I came to yesterday morning, I imagine it was the first one after the wreck.'

'Possibly. And have you seen nothing pass at sea, either near or far off?'

'Nothing. Yet I have gazed seaward all the time it has been light on each day. Where do you think we are?'

'If the island is uninhabited, I think it must be one of the Cormora group, since it can scarcely be part of the Chagos Archipelago--they are too far to the east. And all the others in the Indian Ocean--certainly in this part of it--are inhabited.'

She made no reply now--she did not say what almost every other woman in her position would undoubtedly have said--namely, that she hoped they would in some way be taken off the island. For, in absolute fact, she did not hope so. To be saved from this desolation, to be put on board some ship which might be going to any part of the world, even though that part should be England itself, meant leaving Gilbert behind--leaving him to his ocean grave. And she would not--certainly she would not yet--consent to believe that he had met with such a grave. The *Emperor of the Moon* was still there, a part of her above the water although she was almost turned upside down, or 'turned turtle,' as she knew the sailors called it, and--and--might not some of those who were in her when she struck be still sheltering, clinging to some portion of the wreck that happened to be above water? She did not know much about ships, this awful, fateful voyage being her only experience, wherefore she thought and hoped and prayed that such a chance as this which she imagined in her mind might be possible. While, too, she remembered that Gilbert and her uncle were both blind. Therefore, if they were still alive, they could not cast themselves into the sea to escape out of the vessel--they would not, indeed, know that there was an island close to them, and, probably, would imagine that the ship was wrecked upon some reef or rock, so that it would be doubly dangerous to venture to leave her. And, again, even if they could by any wild chance have guessed that there was an island near, how would they in their blindness have known which way to proceed to reach it?

Thus, by such arguments, she had endeavoured to solace her sad, aching heart, and now, as

she rose to leave Stephen Charke for the night, she put into words the thoughts which had been present to her mind from almost the first moment she had discovered that they themselves were saved.

'Do you think,' she asked, standing there gazing down on him once more--'do you think any who were in the ship when we escaped can be still alive? Is there any hope of that?'

He looked up at her swiftly as she made the suggestion, then--because he felt that it was useless to encourage such vain longings--because, also, he knew that such a thing was impossible--absolutely, entirely impossible, he said: 'No, no! It cannot be. Those who were in the cabin would be submerged as the ship went over, and those who were on the deck would be thrown into the sea.'

She gave a bitter sigh as he answered her--and it went to his heart to hear that sigh, since now his pity for her was heroic, sublime, in its self-abnegation--as great as were also his love and adoration; then she asked:

'And where was Gilbert--Lieutenant Bampfyld?'

'He--he--was lying by the wheel. God pity him! He was a brave, noble officer. Even in his blindness he had crept up to help at the wheel, and was determined to do something towards saving the ship if possible. Then--then--he fell down from exhaustion. He----'

'--is dead!' she muttered, in a voice that sounded like a knell. 'Dead! oh, my God! he is dead. I wish I were dead, too!'

CHAPTER XX

'I DO BELIEVE YOU'

She moved away from him now that the night was at hand, intending to seek a little knoll that was hollowed out by Nature so that it presented the appearance of a small cave of about six feet in depth and the same in breadth. Above it there grew, tall, stately, and feathery, two cocoa trees close together; around it trailed tropical creepers and huge-leaved plants which bore upon them large white flowers. It was into this cave she had crept the night before and had slept, and to it she now intended to go again, it being, as she thought, better perhaps to pass the night there than in the open air. Yet, had she but known, it offered her no necessary shelter, since, in truth, none was required--especially at this season. Dews scarcely ever arose in the island, there being little, if any, of that dampness at night for which the poisonous deadly West Coast of Africa is so evilly renowned, and one might sleep in the open air as free from the dangers of exhalations as in any closed place that could be devised here.

But, not being aware of this--as how should she who, hitherto, had known so little of the world outside London--outside England?--she spoke to Stephen Charke ere she left him for the night, saying: 'I wish there was something to cover you with--something to protect you. Yet there is nothing--not a rag.'

'It is of no importance,' he said, looking up at her, and able to see her face, pale and ghostlike, by the light of the stars. 'Of none whatever. I shall be able to lie here and sleep very well. There is no fear of damp or fever in all this locality. I know it well. And, tomorrow, I hope to be able to get up and go about the island. Perhaps, beyond that mountain at the back, there may be some signs of human habitation--of human life. Do not think of me. Good-night. Sleep well. Try to sleep well.'

'Good-night,' she answered, 'Good-night!'; and then she slowly withdrew to the cave in the little knoll, and so left him.

But, when she had gone, and had lain herself down upon the soft, dry sand within that cave, sleep refused to come to her. The night before she had slept long and soundly, perhaps because of all that she had gone through, and because also she was battered and bruised and weak after her immersion in the sea and the contact with the rocks. But to-night she could not do so--her mind was now triumphant over her body; the hour of that mind's agony was upon her. And she bent and swayed beneath this agony, and recognised, acknowledged, all the ruin that had fallen on her future life and hopes and dreams of happiness to come.

Her lover, her future husband, was gone--was dead! Her heart was broken; there was in actual fact no future before her. She had loved him madly, blindly, almost from the first time she had set eyes on him, and now--now he was dead. There was nothing more. She would never love any

other man; none other could ever find his way into her heart as Gilbert Bampfylde had done, nor set every pulse and fibre in her body stirring, nor cause her to thank God when she awoke each morning that another day had dawned when, even though she might not see him, she could still pass many waking hours in thinking of him. No; no other man would ever have the power to cause all that. Henceforth, if she ever left this island alive, it would be to return to a joyless, hopeless life--a woman widowed ere she had become a wife.

Thus she thought and mused as she lay in the cave, her head supported on one hand while she looked out on all that devilish, cruel waste of waters which had hurled the ship to its destruction and slain almost every soul on board her, and which now--like some wanton trampling on the ruin and despair that she has caused--was smiling before her in the rays of a crescent moon that was just peeping above the eastern horizon. Indeed, the glimmer which this young moon sent shimmering along the tropical sea was not unlike the false sad smile that a wanton's lips might wear in the hour of her victim's ruin; the smile that bespeaks 'the painting of a sorrow, a face without a heart.'

A little breeze sprang up now, a ripple soft as a lover's kiss; balmy, too--as it played among all the rich tropical vegetation of the island--as a young girl's pure breath, and she saw that her fellow-castaway perceived it, since he turned himself so as to bring his face towards it--doubtless to cool his heated frame and to get relief from the warm, tepid air that hung all around--air that was like the atmosphere of a Turkish bath. And this led her thoughts away from her own sorrows into the direction of those griefs which must be his--towards this brave, valiant man, who had saved her life at, as she knew must be the case, the risk of his own. His lot was also sad, she recognised, sad because he loved her--as it would have been the merest affectation for her to pretend to doubt--and because she knew that never could this love obtain that which it hungered for. Yet, all the same, there had come into her heart a feeling of intense sorrow for him; sorrow and pity that had welled up into her bosom and was almost holy in its depth and purity.

'To love and lose, as I have done,' she murmured; 'to love and never win, as is the case with him. Oh, God! could there be aught to make our bitterness--our lot--more terrible?'

Suddenly, she started and raised herself higher with her elbow, her nerves quivering, her heart beating violently, her eyes staring intently into the shade beneath a copse, in which grew in wild profusion a tangled mass of cocoa trees and tamarinds, of orange bushes and lemon trees, and into which, now, the new moon's rays were glinting.

For she had seen something moving there--something creeping, crawling close to the ground--stealthily, secretly--as though desirous to approach the spot where they were both so near together, without being heard or seen.

What new horror was this that approached them in the night, that crept in ambush towards them as though intent on secret murder and attack? What! Some native of this horrid region lusting for the stranger's blood, or some wild beast as fierce!

Her; tongue cleaved to her mouth--she could feel that the roof of the latter was becoming dry--she tried to scream--and failed!

And, still, close to the earth, that thing crept--nearer--nearer--and once, as it either pushed some underbrush aside or came more into view, a ray of the moon glistened on a pair of eyes, illuminating the pupils for a moment. Then she found her voice and shrieked aloud:

'Mr. Charke! Mr. Charke! There is something creeping towards us. Save us! Save us!'

In a moment he was endeavouring to spring to his feet, but this he could not do owing to his soreness and contusions; yet, nevertheless, he staggered up a moment later and gazed around, wishing that he had some weapon to his hand.

That cry of Bella's--it rang along the desolate beach as, may be, no woman's voice had ever rung there before!--brought matters to a crisis. There was a rush, a spring from the creature that had, by now, crawled so near to them; a spring which hurled Charke back reeling as the thing passed him and then brought it, itself, close to Bella, about and around whom it at once began to gambol, rudely and roughly, as some great watch-dog might do who had found its lost mistress.

The creature was Bengalee, the tiger-cub, and, in some way, it, if nothing else, was saved from the wreck of the *Emperor of the Moon*.

'Oh!' cried Bella, half fearfully at its furious bounds and leaps, which, even in her nervousness, she could not but construe into a wild, savage joy on its part at once more being in her presence, 'it is Bengalee. Oh, thank God!'

'Thank God?' Charke repeated, not understanding. 'Thank God for what?'

'It is a sign,' she said, 'a sign that we are not the only ones who have escaped. Think! think! If this creature could get ashore, so--so may others have done.'

For a moment he said nothing, contenting himself with watching the exultation of the creature and in reflecting that it was her shriek which had told it who those were to whom it had drawn so

near--with, perhaps, if stung by hunger and privation, a vastly different intention from that of fondling either of them! And he did think of what she hinted in connection with its safety and its having reached the island alive, as well as of that safety pointing to the fact that others, that human beings, might also have done so. Only--he knew, and knowing, refrained from saying, that her deduction was by no means accurate. This animal had been on the deck when the ship heeled over on the reef; it was confined only in a locker from which it might easily have forced its way out in its terror, or, indeed, might have fallen out of it, but it was an animal, and its blindness had left it! Gilbert Bampfylde had also been on the deck, Charke remembered, but was still blind. There was no analogy between the tiger-cub and any human soul on board.

'You do not answer,' she said, as now Bengalee lay panting at her feet, its rough evidences of delight having ceased for a time; 'you do not speak. You think there is no likelihood of any others being saved from the wreck?'

'I cannot think so. Heaven knows that, if I could comfort you with such hopes, I would. But----'

And now he repeated aloud those silent thoughts and arguments of a moment ago; while, as he did so, he saw, in the moonlight, that she turned from him, and he heard her whisper low: 'Heaven help me!'

Then, because her misery and woe struck like a knife to his heart, he said:

'To-morrow, if I am strong enough, as I think I shall be, I will make a journey round the island and explore every spot upon it, where, if--if any one should have, by God's mercy, been fortunate enough to reach the land, I must light upon them. Believe me, nothing shall be left undone that I can do.'

'I do believe you,' she cried; 'I do, indeed. Ah, Mr. Charke,' she almost wailed, 'how good and noble you are! Oh that such goodness, such nobility must go for ever unrequited!'

'That,' he answered, and she, also, could see by the aid of the moon's rays that on his face there came a wan smile, a smile that had not even the ghost of happiness in it, 'that is not to be thought of--never. Let us put away for ever all thoughts of my desires; let us think only of what we have to do. To find, first, whether, in Providence, there should be any others who have escaped from the wreck, and, next, how we are to escape out of this. If there are other islands near here which are inhabited, no matter by whom or what, it may be easy.'

'And if not?'

'Then we must wait until, by some signal or other which I may devise, we can attract the attention of a passing vessel. Beyond this I can think of nothing.'

'Oh!' she exclaimed, 'much as I long to return home to England, to my mother--I think only of her now, I have none other of whom to think--yet--yet, ah, I could not go till I was sure, sure beyond all possibility of doubt, that Gilbert was not here or somewhere near. Think, if he should be still alive and blind and wounded! Here and unable to help himself. Oh, it would be almost worse than to know that he was dead.'

'I do think,' Charke answered; 'I understand. And until we are sure, one way or the other, we will not go: no, not even though rescue came to-morrow.'

Then, looking down at the tiger-cub which had now risen to its feet again, and was pacing restlessly about with the sinuous, lithe movements peculiar to its race, he said: 'But there is also one other thing that must be done. That creature is now beyond control, even by you; and these beasts are treacherous to the core. If it is to live, and we are to live also, it must be secured--made prisoner. Otherwise something terrible will happen. I know it; feel sure of it.'

CHAPTER XXI

WASHED ASHORE

They had both slept again by the time that the morning broke with the suddenness of the tropics, while the coming of the sun was heralded by the pale primrose hue which all who have been between Capricorn and Cancer know so well; that hue being followed by the vermilion and golden shafts of light, and then by a deep blood-red tinge which suffused all the horizon. They had slept uneasily, each in their place; with--outside, near the opening of the little cave under the knoll--the tiger lying tranquilly as though keeping watch and ward over her whom, probably, it deemed its friend and mistress. Yet, ever and again, as she, while waking to regard it more than once--because of the fear which Stephen's words had engendered in her mind--saw very well, its

yellow eyes peered out restlessly from their closed slits of eyelids, the pupil of each eye being itself a horizontal slit only. And she acknowledged that Charke had spoken aright, that the time had come for the creature to be either imprisoned or made away with. All its evil instincts were undoubtedly being developed with its growth; soon, they would have obtained their full force and be, perhaps, exerted. It was time.

But now the dawn was come, the blood-red of the Eastern sky was plainly visible, and the birds of the island were twittering to each other and pluming themselves; whereon the girl rose and left the cave, and passed quietly by the creature lying so close to her as though in fear of arousing it. In actual fear of it, indeed, since she did not know but that it might turn and rend her at any moment. For it was big enough and strong enough to do so now, its size being that of a large retriever, or a year-old mastiff; and she, or he, even--that stalwart muscular sailor--would probably have had little chance against it if it had set upon them, since both were unarmed and both were weakened and broken down by their struggles in the tempest-tossed waves.

Charke, seeing the girl rise from her recumbent position, rose also, quickly and quietly, and came towards her, while as he did so he said: 'Now, to-day is the time for me to make that search round the island which I promised you. We will but eat a little fruit, and then I will set out.'

'Shall I go with you?' she asked, as, taking up the cocoanut shell, she turned to go towards the rivulet that ran at her feet, 'or is it better for me to remain here? Perhaps, too, it may be more than I can do. Or, indeed,' she hastened to add, 'more than you can accomplish in one day, and in such heat as there will be. Oh, Mr. Charke,' she continued, 'you are not strong enough to undertake it yet!'

'I feel strong enough this morning,' he replied, 'and, if I cannot make the whole tour of the place in one day, I can at least do a considerable part of it. I will begin at once, before the sun becomes too fierce. But, as for you, perhaps it would be best if you stayed here. The outlook from this portion of the island is, I think, the one from which any ship that happened to pass would be most likely to be observed. You see, we look west from here, towards where Africa lies, and vessels use that track in preference to running more out into the open.'

'I will do anything you suggest,' she said. 'Anything you think will be for the best. But'--and again there came upon her face that stricken look which made his heart so sad for her, and which, whenever he observed it, caused him to bury every sorrow for himself in a more profound and unselfish one for her--'but--you know--I--I--at present--just at present--for a day or so--do not wish to see a ship come here to rescue us.'

'I know, I know,' he answered, not daring to keep his eyes fixed full upon that lovely but unhappy face. 'I know. Well, we will not look out for rescue yet. But, still, I think you had better stay here. We do not know for certain the size of this island; it is only guesswork on my part. It may be too far a walk, too much of an undertaking for you. You are not afraid--of that?' he continued, as he directed his eyes towards Bengalee, while seeing how, as he was speaking, she, too, had let her glance fall upon the cub, which was now pacing restlessly about at their feet.

'No,' she said, 'I am not. Yet what you said in the night was true. It is growing beyond control, and, of course, I know how treacherous and savage these animals are. It was a piece of girlish folly on my part to beg poor uncle to save it.'

'I scarcely know how we are to make away with it,' he replied. 'I have nothing but this,'--and he took from his pocket a little white-handled penknife, which he had probably bought for a shilling off a card exposed in a London shop window. 'I could hardly kill it with that. However, one thing is certain, it will die of starvation ere long on this island. It cannot live on fruit as we can, nor catch birds, and there are no signs of animals, not even rats or mice, as far as I can see.'

'Oh, poor thing; what a dreadful death to die!' the girl exclaimed, her pity at once awakened for a creature which had been more or less her pet for some few weeks. Yet she hastened to ask if starvation did not make such animals even more fierce than usual, and if the risk to them both would not, thereby, be increased. Then, before he could reply, she suddenly exclaimed, as her glance fell on the sea, 'What is that out there? Surely--surely--it is not a drowned man? Oh, not that--not that!'

Following the direction of that glance, he saw something drifting about on the tranquil, almost rippleless, water over which by now the rays of the risen sun were gleaming horizontally. Something that, since it was end-on towards them and the island, was not easily to be distinguished, yet was, all the same, undoubtedly no drowned man nor human body, alive or dead. At first he thought it might be a dead shark--his knowledge of the sea telling him at once that it was not a living one, since they never expose aught but the dorsal fin when swimming--then, a second later, he recognised what the object was.

'No,' he exclaimed, anxious to appease her terrors at once--while knowing to whom, and, above all others, to whose *dead* body those terrors pointed--'No, that is no body, living or dead. Instead, it is one of our quarter-boats. Washed out of the chocks when the ship turned on her side, no doubt, and floating about ever since.'

'It is coming nearer,' Bella exclaimed, her eyes still on it and full of delight at hearing that in it

there was, at least, no confirmation of one awful fear; 'do you not think so?'

'Undoubtedly it is coming nearer. It will strike the shore just there if the reef does not catch it'; and he pointed with sailor-like certainty to a spot close by. 'It will be a mercy if it does.'

'Why? We could not escape from this place in that, could we?'

'Hundreds of sailors have escaped death in smaller boats than that; ay, and lived for many days, too, on an open and rough sea in such boats. But it is not for that only. If it comes ashore I can make a visit to the poor old *Emperor* and find out something, if not all, that I--that we--want to know. While, though we need not put to sea in it, we may use it to get to some other island which is inhabited, by, perhaps, white men; but, anyhow, by some one. It will be of the greatest assistance, especially as, since it floats, it must be undamaged. I trust the oars, if not the sail, are in it.'

And now, listening to his words, Bella became as eager for the quarter-boat to come ashore as her companion was, and, together, they went down to the spot he had indicated as that which the boat was likely to arrive at--a spot about sixty yards from where they were.

As Bella walked by her preserver's side she was wondering many things, and especially if he would, indeed, be able now to discover what the fate of the others in the *Emperor* had been, and, above all, if, by the aid of this boat, he would be enabled to solve for her the question she hourly, momentarily, asked herself by day and night--the question whether there was any hope left of a life of happiness and bliss to be passed by her lover's side, or whether, for her, the future could bring nothing but a joyless, heartbroken existence henceforth. Also, she mused upon one other thing--namely, what Charke was thinking of while, with his eyes never off the incoming boat, he meditated deeply as, from his knit brows and fixed look, she felt sure he was doing. The thoughts, those that actually were in his mind, he would, undoubtedly, not have divulged, even though she had asked him to do so, since they were such as could only have caused grief unspeakable. For he was thinking that, since this quarter-boat had been washed out of the chocks and off the deck into the sea, and had then floated about for forty-eight hours in the neighbourhood previous to being directed by some subtle current to the island, so other things that were on deck would be subject to the same conditions. The bodies of drowned men; the body of her lover! He knew that the sea and its currents and tides work in calm weather with as much regularity as the sun and the moon work in their rising and setting, and, indeed, as the seasons themselves work; and he knew, also, that if Gilbert's body--which was close to where the quarter-boat rested when the ship struck--had been washed into the sea at the same time as it, then it was most probable, nay, almost certain, that it also would come ashore at the same spot and perhaps almost at the same time.

What horror, what fresh horror, would that be for this poor devoted girl to experience! For, in his own heart, he never doubted for one moment that somewhere close at hand the body of Gilbert Bampfyld was floating about.

The boat was coming very close into the shore now, so close that they could see that one oar was in it, but only one, and that there was nothing else, while they observed, too, that the rudder was not fixed in the braces. Yet that mattered little to Stephen Charke if he could only once get possession of the boat itself, since with one oar on such a glossy sheet of water as this ocean was now, he could propel and steer it easily enough.

'I am glad, thankful, it is coming ashore,' he said now. 'I had thought of swimming out to the ship, only I dreaded the sharks. Little use as one's life may be, one would scarcely care to lose it by the jaws of those brutes.'

And, though he did not see it, the girl by his side gave him a glance such as would, perhaps, have cheered his heart had he done so. 'Was not her own life, also, of little enough use,' she asked herself as he spoke, 'to make her sympathise with his remark? Would it not be a broken and dejected one, henceforth, if that which she dreaded, which she had almost forced herself to feel sure must be the case, should be proved to be so beyond all doubt before many more hours had passed?' For every hope with which she had buoyed herself was sinking in her breast, as moment after moment went by and the time grew longer and longer since the wreck had taken place.

The boat touched the white, pebbly beach now, grating on it with a gentle scrape, and Stephen, who had gone close to the water's edge to await its arrival, put out his hand, and, seizing first the stern and then the painter, drew it a foot or two farther on shore. Then he got into it, and, grasping the solitary oar which had remained in the boat simply because the loom, or handle, had got caught beneath the stern thwart, prepared to shove off in it.

'You will not mind,' he said, as he did so, 'being left alone for half an hour? This will not take me away from you for so long as when I go round the island.' While she, in answer, shook her head to indicate that she was not at all afraid of being left by herself.

CHAPTER XXII

A SAILOR'S KNIFE

'She is perfectly sound and watertight,' he called back to her as, with the hand which was uninjured, he threw the oar over the boat's stern, and worked her out from the shore. 'If we want her to help us off to another island she will do it, if I can only find another oar floating about somewhere.'

Then he propelled her as swiftly as he could to where the *Emperor of the Moon* lay outside the rock, her keel and copper bottom gleaming in the bright morning sun.

As he drew near to the ship he began to perceive how all hope of the likelihood that any one should still be alive and imprisoned in the ship must be abandoned. She had turned over even more than he had at first imagined when regarding her from the shore of the island, so that the keel was almost level in a manner exactly the opposite from what sailors mean when they talk about a 'level keel.' It stuck up now, so far as it was out of water, as some sharp mountain ridge seems to stick up when regarded from a valley, and showed an almost horizontal line; while, beneath the keel and above the water, for half the length of the vessel, there was visible a portion of the outside of the main hold, down to (or up from) her diagonal ribboned-lines. And, here, there was a great gaping wound, a hole smashed into her side large enough to have let the whole Indian Ocean pour into the devoted ship directly it was made, and (although there might well be others which were not visible) sufficient to have filled and sunk, forthwith, the largest vessel that was ever launched. The force of the impact was to be appreciated, too, by the manner in which her copper sheathing was driven into her and burst, so that, where the blow had been struck by the jagged tooth of the rock, the latter looked like a destroyed *chevaux-de-frise*, or, for a better comparison, a paper hoop through which an acrobat had passed. And, in this burst and broken protection, as in other and less terrible circumstances it might have been (though naturally it had proved useless here), the sheathing-nails stuck out like brilliant, gleaming yellow teeth, all broken and distorted.

Charke brought the quarter-boat alongside the upturned or leaning bottom, so that, by looking through this gaping wound, he could peer into the now reversed decks and see that there lay, on what had once been the roof of it but was now the floor, a mass of articles, such as is usually stowed away in a ship's lower decks. A mass, composed of cables and old and new sails, as well as some stores, consisting of dozens of tinned-meat cans unopened, boxes of sardines, and so forth, and several old sea chests and trunks--all lying, of course, helter-skelter, as they had been thrown together by the ship's reversal.

'There are some things of use here,' Charke thought, 'and worth taking away,' whereupon he ran the painter through a small hole in the sheathing and tied it tightly, and then scrambled up the vessel's inverted side until he was able to drop himself through the opening into the deck, taking care that he tore neither his flesh nor his clothes in doing so. Being there, he selected a small sail which he found; it was indeed, a boat sail, and had its gear of mast and tackle attached, while, passing it through the orifice, he dropped it carefully into the boat, and then he took next a few of the tins of provisions, and dropped them into her, too. And, also, he found something which would be to him, in the utterly unprovided condition in which Bella and he had escaped to the island, of the greatest service. This was a long, sharp knife in its leather sheath, such as sailors strap to their sides, and was new and in good condition, so that he did not doubt that the last seaman who had been sent below to this deck had dropped it there, and he was able to picture to himself the man's annoyance, probably expressed aloud and with a good deal of vehemence and strong language, over his loss. This done--and the doing of it had not taken long--he prepared to leave the disordered hold, when he remembered that there was one thing he wanted, namely, some cable. 'That tiger has to die at once,' he muttered to himself. 'With a piece of stout rope and this knife--which would slay anything, from a horse downwards--its death should not be difficult of accomplishment.'

Then, having selected two or three pieces of cable of different strands, he got out through the hole again and into the boat.

It is almost needless to write down that he found no sign of human life as he rowed about and round the wrecked *Emperor of the Moon* for some moments afterwards. Needless, too, perhaps, to add that he had never expected to find any. He was a sailor, accustomed to disaster at sea and full also of much acquired knowledge pertaining to many of the calamities which it had never been his lot to experience heretofore; and he knew--he felt sure, and would have staked his life upon the certainty of his convictions--that of all who had been in that doomed ship an hour before she struck, none except Bella Waldron and himself were now alive. Those who had been below in the cabins or saloon, those also who were in forecastle or galley, had met, must have met, not only with their deaths but their graves at one and the same time; while as for the unhappy and blind young officer who had caused him so much heartache by winning the woman whom he loved so fondly, and whom he had once hoped to win--why, it was impossible that he should still

be alive. If he had been washed ashore, it could be only as a corpse, and it was most improbable that even that should have happened. In truth, he believed that, with all the others, he had been carried below by the overturning of the ship and then pinned down, buried, beneath the mass of the fabric. Otherwise, since the boat had floated ashore, so, too, would he have done by now.

'The woman he had hoped to win,' he repeated softly to himself, as still he sculled the quarter-boat round and round while peering down into the dark blue depths as far as he could penetrate; and while endeavouring also to perceive some sign or memorial--even so much as a cap or straw hat--of one of those poor drowned sailors imprisoned below--'the woman he had hoped to win!' And as the phrase rose to his mind, though not to his lips, he recalled as well how he had cherished the thought of the length of voyage that had lain before her ere she could join her lover in India; how, too, he had pondered on half a hundred things which might happen ere the old *Emperor* should be anchored in Bombay harbour. Almost, now, those meditations seemed to have been prophetic--for what had not happened! The girl's lover was gone, removed by death, and she had none other in the world on whom to lean but himself. And what was more, she spoke kindly to him; she pitied him, he could well perceive; there was something between them now, a deep sympathy, a reliance on each other in their misfortunes, which had never existed before.

'The woman he had hoped to win?' Well!--he scarce dared whisper the thought to his longing heart, yet it was there!--the thought, the hope that in days to come, in after-months, perhaps years, when her grief for Gilbert Bampfylde was mellowed and softened by time, when she knew him better and should fully recognise how profound his adoration for her was, he might still win her! She could not, young as she was, and with all the years of a long life before her, sorrow for ever--sorrow for a memory that would at last be nothing but a shadow.

'He *would* win her!' he said aloud to himself now, as he worked the boat ashore, 'he was resolved he would.' The one obstacle in his path was removed, the brave, gallant young officer was gone, brushed aside by Fate. He would win her yet!

He stepped ashore now to where she was standing watching him, and it seemed almost--if his recent thoughts had not tinged his present fancies with a roseate hue--that there was a look of greeting and welcome to him in her eyes, even as she saw that he had come back--even at the ending of so short an absence as his had been! Was she beginning now--now that she had none other in the world to watch for--to desire to have him always near her? Ah, if that were indeed so! Then--then he might win her at last.

'You found,' she asked, speaking low, and in those sad tones which had come into her voice of late, and since disaster had fallen heavily on them, 'you found no sign of any others having been saved?'

'No,' he said, also softly. 'No, there are no signs of that. Miss Waldron--I am neither cruel nor hard of heart, but--oh, how can I say it!--it is useless to hope.'

'Useless! Ah, well, I suppose it is--it must be! And, God help me, it must also be borne.' Then she turned away from him with the desire to prevent the tears which had risen to her eyes from being seen by him, and went back to the shade of the trees under which she had been sitting until she saw the quarter-boat returning with him in it. And he followed her, carrying the cable which he brought away from the ship; the knife which he had found being in his pocket and the sail with its gear left in the boat. The sun was terribly fierce now, so fierce that to be beneath its rays for only a few moments was to risk sunstroke or to be burnt more red than he had long since been, or she since her exposure on the island; and, of course, he could not attempt the projected tour of the place until that sun once more sank low in the west. There was, therefore, nothing now to do but to sit idly gazing out to sea and watch for signs of any ship which might pass near enough to perceive them, when they should have erected signals.

'After the tour round the island,' he said to her, as he sat by her side beneath the palm trees and occupied his time in plaiting some of the long, thick grass which grew at their feet into something that should serve for hats, or, at least, coverings for their heads, 'after the tour, when we have had the last sad satisfaction of knowing that there can be none who have escaped, you will not object to my endeavouring to arrange for our being taken off? The Mozambique Channel is full of ships on their way to India during the time of the southwest monsoon--you will let me make signals, will you not?'

'I am in your hands,' she replied, her eyes on him. 'You must do all that you think best. Ah, Mr. Charke, you do not know how grateful I feel to you!'

'Never say that. Not a word. I knew, I thought, I could save one besides myself, and, naturally,' he went on simply, 'I saved you.'

Then both sat on musing and meditating in silence.

'Here comes the tiger,' he said now, seeing the creature stalking towards them in the lithe, treacherous manner peculiar to its race. 'I imagine it has been endeavouring to find food. I brought off some tinned things from the ship; yet, cruel as it seems to be, it is not advisable, I think, to give it anything in the shape of flesh. Meanwhile, if it will only go to sleep we ought to secure it,' and, as he spoke, he took up one of the pieces of cable and commenced tying what is

known to sailors as a double-diamond knot. But, previously, he had fastened the other end securely round one of the palm trees that grew close by him.

'There will be one advantage in this,' he said, 'namely, that the more it pulls against it the tighter will come the loop, so that its intelligence will prevent it from straining at the rope and strangling itself.'

'Poor wretch,' Bella exclaimed, 'how gaunt and lean it is growing! I recognise that it cannot be kept alive or even taken off with us when we are found here; yet--yet I am sorry for it.'

'Yes,' he answered, 'I understand that, but it has to be done--must be done--it is imperative. In the state it is now in from hunger, and also owing to its increasing strength, our lives are no longer safe with it, and certainly not with it at large; while, if one of us were to scratch our hands, or even get the slightest wound, and the creature smelt the blood, which it would undoubtedly do--well, the result might be terrible. Now, see, it's going to sleep; it appears exhausted. I must drop the loop over its head.'

'No,' she answered, 'let me do that. It is still very docile with me,' and, as she spoke, she took the loop from his hand and, while patting the creature's head--whereon it raised it as a dog will raise its head when stroked by a loved hand--she dropped that hand down until the rope was round its neck, though not without muttering some words of regret as to what she deemed her treachery.

'It is no treachery,' he said, 'no more treachery, indeed, than to tie up a mastiff in its kennel. And, even though it were, it would not matter. These creatures are themselves the incarnation of treachery. However, the main point is that it is now secure. It is not yet strong enough to burst this rope.'

Such was the case, yet it was strange that to so acute a mind as Charke's there had not occurred the idea that it would not take a tiger very long to gnaw a ship's rope through if it desired its release.

CHAPTER XXIII

'THE TIGER DID THAT'

When the sun began to drop towards where Africa lay, afar off and invisible, and when (because of the dense foliage which crowned the slopes of the island that rose behind the beach) that portion where they sat was rapidly becoming shaded from its burning rays, Stephen Charke said that the time had come for him to think of making his tour of the place, or, at least, of accomplishing a part of it. The air, it is true, still resembled that which one feels when they have approached too near to a furnace, or, for a further simile, have descended into the engine-room of a steamer. Yet, now, there would be no danger of sunstroke, and the expedition, such as it was, might very well be undertaken.

'My idea is,' Charke said, 'to begin now, this afternoon, by starting to the left and going on along the shore until I am nearly opposite this place on the other side of the island; then I will come back here, crossing it, and to-morrow I will do the same thing with the other side. That way there cannot be much left unexplored by to-morrow evening. What do you think?'

'I think,' Bella answered, 'that you are the most unselfish, heroic man I ever knew. Ah, Mr. Charke,' she continued, 'I know very well why you are doing this, why you are going to make this journey round the island. It is to satisfy me, it is for my sake. If you were alone here you would never do it, but occupy yourself only on thoughts of how to get away, and----'

'No,' he said, 'no. Had I been the only person who got ashore from the wreck I should, as a sailor, as a comrade of the others, have deemed it my duty to make a thorough search through the island ere I took steps to quit it. I shall have, as the survivor of the *Emperor of the Moon*, to make a report----'

'I understand,' she said quietly. 'I understand. Nothing that you can say will make me feel my obligations to you any the less.'

For Bella Waldron knew as well as Stephen Charke himself knew, that what she had just said was the absolute fact; she knew that he was going to undertake this fresh toil--for toil it was, after all he had gone through, after his bruises and buffeting with the waves, and in this terrible torrid-zone heat--for her and on her account alone. He was going to undertake it with the desire of easing her heart and preventing her, in after-years, from being able to reproach herself with

having left the spot while any chance remained of there being one of those who were dear to her upon it.

She was, too, perfectly aware that he did not for one moment believe--alas! how could he, a trained, intelligent seaman, believe?--that there was any other soul left alive out of all those who had been in the ill-fated vessel when she struck on the rock. And, being thus unable to believe, could she regard him as aught else than that which a moment before she had termed him, 'a most unselfish, heroic man'?

Before he left her he asked if she would not partake of some of the tinned meats, or sardines, which he had managed to obtain from the upturned hold, but as the girl replied that it was far too hot to eat anything but the wild fruit growing in such profusion all around, and also that she was not hungry, he decided that he would not open one of the tins for himself. He, too, could do very well on what there was to their hands for the trouble of picking, since, here, in this tropical, steaming atmosphere, eating scarcely seemed a necessity of life; while, if it were, then those glorious bananas whose golden and crimson hues merged so superbly into each other were amply sufficient. But, also, he had another reason for not opening the preserved meat. The odour of it would--might--arouse the cub's desires, and, once aroused, they would possibly stir the animal almost to frenzy if ungratified.

He rose now and prepared to set out, there being still two full hours of daylight left; two full hours ere the sun would be gone and the swift, dark night had fallen at once upon all around--the outcome of a dusky veil which the sun appears to fling behind it as it departs, and out of which emerges black obscurity, lit only by the burning, silvery constellations. But, ere he went, he asked if she feared to be left alone for so long.

'No,' she replied, 'no. Why should I? What is there to hurt me here?'

'There may be people on the island all the same,' he replied, 'even if they have not yet discovered our presence; although I do not think it likely.'

'Nor do I. If there were they would by now, in two days, have observed that,'--and she pointed towards the wreck--'and have come down to it. We are alone,' she concluded with a sigh. 'There is no one else here but you and I.' And still again she sighed.

'Yes,' he answered, understanding all that her words meant, all the heartbrokenness that they expressed. 'Yes, we are alone; there are no others.' After which he left her, saying that, by dark, or very shortly afterwards, he would be back again.

When he had departed, after looking round once to wave his hand ere a bend of the shore hid him from her view (and she noticed that, true to his sailor's instincts, he went towards the boat and inspected it, and then drew it up a little more on to the white-pebbled beach and made the painter more secure), she went down to the rivulet and cooled her face and hands and feet in it, and made some attempt at arranging her hair, while using the stream as a mirror. Yet it was little enough that she could do in the way of a toilet, since she had nothing that would serve as a comb nor any soap or towel. After which, feeling refreshed, nevertheless, by this attempt, she returned to where she had been sitting and gazed out seaward, meditating deeply.

'What an end,' she murmured, as she did so, while from her eyes the tears flowed freely now--the more so because there was none to observe them--'what an end to all! Gilbert, who was to have been my husband, dead! Gilbert, whom I so loved with my whole heart and soul, dead! and lying beneath that ship. Oh, Gilbert, Gilbert, Gilbert, my love, come back to me. And my poor uncle and aunt, too. Oh, God, what a disaster! What a disaster!'

And now she wept piteously, so piteously that, if that other man, who had risked his own chances to save her as well as himself, could have seen her, the sight would have gone near to break his heart. That other man! At this moment her thoughts turned to him too. Almost unconsciously she found herself thinking of him, speculating on what his future would be. 'He will never marry,' she murmured. 'I know it. Feel sure of it. It would be the idlest affectation to ignore his sentiments for me. Yet--yet--how sad, how mournful a life must his be henceforth; no home to go to, no wife to welcome him, none to make him happy. Poor Mr. Charke. Poor Stephen. Our lots will be similar, we must be friends, always friends.'

Meanwhile, he was making his way along the beach, which was still shaded from the sun and becoming, indeed, more and more so as he progressed farther round the island, away from the west. And every step which he took served only to confirm him in what he had believed, known from the first--the unlikelihood of there being any other person saved from the wreck.

'Surely,' he muttered to himself, 'if he should have drifted ashore, it would have been here. The current sets this way, and also the monsoon blows towards this island. Living or dead, he would have come to this neighbourhood if he had come at all. The tiger did that, and, doubtless--'

He paused at those words. 'The tiger did that!' and for a moment it seemed to him that his heart stood still. 'The tiger did that!' Ay, but did it? Was he wrong in the surmise, wrong in his deduction? Did the cub land here or hereabouts? Reflecting, recalling the night before, the early dawn, when Bella shrieked to him and awoke him from a half-slumber into which he had fallen,

he recollected that the beast had sprung forth from the copse of orange and lemon trees that was to the right of the little spot where he had waded ashore with the girl in his arms, and where, after carrying her up far above the waterline, he had dropped senseless. It had sprung at them from the right side, was coming from the right; and it was not to be believed, it was, indeed, beyond all belief, that it could previously have passed across where they were from the other side without having been noticed by one of them, especially by Bella, who was wide awake. It was coming from the right; it had, doubtless, therefore, got ashore, been cast ashore, to the right. And he was seeking for signs on--had set out to--the left! Had he, therefore, chosen the most unlikely place in which, if, by the most remote chance, any human being should have been washed ashore, to discover them?

'Shall I go back,' he mused, 'and begin again on the other side? Shall I?' Yet, as he meditated, he reflected that there would be little use in doing so; certainly little use in doing so to-day. An hour had now passed, or nearly so, since he quitted Bella; the sun, he knew, since he could no longer see it, was sinking fast--over the whole of the rich, luxurious vegetation that stretched inland there was now the golden hue, the amber light that, in the tropics, follows after the dazzling, blinding, molten brilliancy of the noontide, directly the sun is no longer vertically above the globe. And also, there was the odour of the coming night all about him, the odour of the declining day when, from every fruit and flower that has drooped through the hottest hours of the earlier portions of that day, there exudes the luscious, sickly scent that travellers know so well.

'No,' he said to himself, 'no. It would be little use to turn back now or to begin again to-night! And--and,' he murmured, thinking deeply as he did so, 'even though he had been cast ashore, he could not now be alive. Blind--unable to see his way--to find any of all the fruit that grows here in such profusion, poor Bampfyl'd would succumb to starvation, even if the life had not been beaten out of him by the waves.'

It was of Gilbert Bampfyl'd alone that he thought, of him alone about whom he speculated, since, of all the others who had been in the *Emperor of the Moon*, he was the only one whose body could by any possibility have come ashore. They, those others, Pooley and his wife, were in the submerged cabin, no power on earth could have got them out of it; any men left in the galley and the fore-castle were in as equally bad a plight. Nothing could have saved them, or have even released their bodies. But, as he thought of Gilbert Bampfyl'd, so he felt sure that he also must have perished, even though he was not thus below as those others had been. Still musing on all this, but with one other image ever present to his mind--the image of the woman he loved--dishevelled and storm-beaten, but always beautiful--the woman of whom, now, he began to dream once more, to dream of winning for his own in some distant day--he went on along the beach, his eyes glancing everywhere around and near him. Glancing into the wild, tangled vegetation, along the channels of the rivulet's courses, but sometimes with them fixed on the beach.

Suddenly he stopped, his heart quivering again, beating fast.

At his feet there lay a sailor's rough jacket, and, a little farther off, a cap--a common, blue-flannel thing, such as the mercantile sailor buys for a few pence at a Ratcliffe Highway slop-shop.

He stopped, regarding them--not with that agitation which the greatest romancer who ever lived has depicted as clutching at Crusoe's heart when he saw the footmarks, but, instead, with a feeling of astonishment; yet a feeling of astonishment which, he told himself, he, a sailor, ought not to experience.

'Do not all wrecks,' he muttered, 'send forth around them countless articles of débris, countless portions of the raffle that encumbers their decks? What more likely than that a sailor's jacket and a cap should have floated ashore?'

Then he stooped, and, feeling them, found that they were thoroughly dry, so that they must have been ashore for some hours at least, since even the fierce sun of the now declining day could not have dried them in less time, all soaked with water as they had been.

CHAPTER XXIV

BEATEN! DEFEATED!

'No,' he said to Bella some time later, and when he had returned to her, 'no other signs than these. Nothing,' while, as he spoke, he pointed to the jacket and cap at his feet. He had brought them with him after the discovery, thinking that perhaps they might be useful when the time came for them to set out in the quarter-boat, as he fully imagined they would have to do, thereby to reach some other island.

'Yet,' she whispered, 'if they, if this animal, too,' indicating Bengalee, who now, what with his being made prisoner by the rope and also by his long fasting, displayed a horrible state of nervous agitation, a state which frightened Bella and rendered even Charke very uneasy, 'if they could be thrown ashore, why not others? Mr. Charke, do you think there is any hope?'

'I cannot buoy you up by saying that I do think so,' he answered. 'Yet be assured of one thing--you will know soon now. To-morrow, at the first sign of dawn, I set out to accomplish the inspection of the other half of the island. It is smaller even than I thought; it will not take long.'

And at daybreak he roused himself to carry out his undertaking, though, even as he rose from the warm, soft sand on which he had lain, he knew, he felt sure, that he was going on a bootless task. Again and again he had told himself, through the night, that, even though Gilbert Bampfylde's body had reached the island, it had never done so with life in it. Yet he would make sure for her sake and for his.

'Heaven bless you,' she exclaimed from where she also rose as she saw him do so, and while going towards him. 'Heaven bless you. You spare yourself no trouble nor fatigue on my account.'

'It is best,' he answered, though he scarcely knew what reply to make. 'It is best that there should be no chance lost. If--if---' Then he held out his hand to her as he had not done before, and at once, after she had taken it, set out upon the remaining portion of his search. And, for some reason which he, perhaps, could not have explained to himself, he cast back no last look at her in the swift-coming daylight--nor gave any word of farewell as he had done on the previous afternoon.

That daylight brought a little breeze with it which was cool and soft as it came off the ocean that, for some hours, had been free from the burning rays of the sun; and Charke made his way along the beach while glancing everywhere, as he had done during his search of yesterday--into every spot wherein, if any one, anything, had come ashore, they would probably have been cast. But as it had been when he proceeded towards the left or south, so it was now as he went towards the right or north end of the island. He found nothing; not even, this time, a rag of clothing or a spar from the ship. He observed, however, amongst other things of which his vigilant eyes took notice, that here the formation of the island was considerably different from what it had been on the southern side. There, as he made his way back inland to Bella, cutting across from the eastern to the western shore, he had found the glades and groves almost flat, except for small knolls and little eminences on which, as everywhere else, there grew the long, deep-green grass, the cocoa trees and tamarinds, and the flowering shrubs and bushes. But here, upon the side he was now following, all was very different. Inland, he could perceive that the surface rose until it developed into quite high hills, and that those hills, forming into spurs as they ran down to the water's edge, created a number of little bays or coves, some of them being scarcely more than fifty yards in breadth. Also he perceived that on high, where the crests or summits of these spurs were, their sides were abrupt declivities resembling often the sheer sides of cliffs instead of sloping gradually and being covered by the deep emerald-green, velvety grass. And they were white as English cliffs--as those of Dover!--and, sometimes, as precipitous. Huge masses, too, of fallen, crumbling rock lay tumbled together at their base and in the tiny valleys which they formed between them, and gave, thereby, signs of either a convulsion which had some time or another taken place, or of their lack of solidity and insecure composition. 'I shall have,' Charke thought, 'a mountainous, up-and-down kind of return journey if I go back to her inland. Yet it will cut off a good deal of the way and make it easier for me.'

He found as he progressed, however, that soon, if he wished to continue his inspection of the whole of the coast, he would, in any circumstances, have to continue his walk more or less inland, since now he could observe, by looking about, that the spurs ran quite out into the sea, so that they hid each little bay from its neighbour on either side of it. Consequently, if he wished to inspect the space between each, he would have to mount to their tops and thus peer down into the recesses that they formed. At present, however, there was no necessity for him to do this. Still looking, he saw that there were three more bays, or coves, which he could reach by walking between the feet of the spurs and the water, the spurs stopping some yards short of the gentle surf which the morning breeze was raising.

'Three,' he said, 'three. This one where I am now, the first; then two more. And, after that, I must ascend and gaze down. There will be no getting farther along the bank.'

So he entered the first cove, finding it as desolate and bare as the others into which he glanced in his journey; bare of everything, and with its white beach so void of all else but its own stones, that it might, that morning, have been swept clean and clear. The second was the same, except that here, upon its beach, there lay the long iron shank of an anchor with one arm and fluke upon it, but with the other gone. An anchor that, he knew at a glance, had never been made in recent days--that, by its quaint form, must be some centuries old. And, even as he continued his journey, he wondered how it had come there, and if, in long-forgotten and unnumbered years, some toilers of the sea had been flung ashore in this spot, and if this was all that had been left by time to hint at the story.

Then he entered the third, and last, bay or cove which remained passable by the shoreway--the last he would be able to inspect until he ascended to the cliffs above.

As he did so he started--knowing, feeling, that beneath his bronze and sunburn he had turned white--recognising that he was trembling with a faint, nervous tremor. For this cove to which he had penetrated was different from the previous ones; it ran back between the two spurs which formed its walls until it merged into the wooded, grassy declivity that sloped down from above, while, at the foot of that declivity, was more grass forming a little carpeted ravine and, growing on it, some of the island trees--orange trees, lemon trees, even bananas.

And on the grass there lay a man. Dead or asleep!

A man, fair-haired, clad in a white drill suit with brass buttons--they glistened now in the rays of the risen sun!--the white uniform of the Royal Navy. A man who was Gilbert Bampfyld.

His heart like ice within his breast--all was lost now, every hope gone that, of late, he had once again begun to cherish!--Stephen Charke advanced to where that man lay, and, approaching noiselessly, looked down on him. Looked down and recognised that here was no sign of death or coming death; that the man was sleeping peacefully and calmly; that he was rescued for the second time within the last month from a sudden doom.

He also saw something else--he observed that Bampfyld had recovered his sight. This he could not doubt. Near him was some fruit which he must have gathered recently. And he had pulled down some of the branches of the trees which grew close by, and had shed them of their leaves, upon which he was now lying, they making an easier pallet than the grass alone would have done, while Charke perceived, also, that he had been fashioning a sturdy branch of the tamarind into a stout stick. Doubtless, he had recovered his sight through the shock of his immersion, when the ship heeled over.

Strong, determined, masterful as Stephen Charke had been through all the disasters which had overwhelmed the *Emperor of the Moon*; brave and stalwart as he had shown himself when, with none other left to command the doomed ship but himself, he had helped to furl and unfurl sails, to steer like any ordinary seaman at the wheel, and to endeavour manfully to hold the vessel up and ward off instant destruction--he was beaten now. Beaten! defeated! And he felt suddenly feeble, so feeble that he was forced to sit down by the saved man's side, while doing it so quietly that the other did not awaken.

Beaten! defeated! Ay, and with nothing left of prospect in the future, nor ever any hope. Nothing! nothing! nothing! What had he hoped? he found himself asking: what, in these last few days? What dreamt of? A home, a wife; perhaps, in the future, children waiting for his return, running to meet him and to beg for stories of the sea, of tempests surmounted, of dangers passed. Now, there would never be any home, nor wife, nor children. Nothing! He had loved one woman fondly, madly; the one woman in all the world for him. Until ten minutes ago he had believed that, some day, he would win her. And, now, it was never to be. His home would be the desolate home which the sailor ashore inhabits; his existence a long series of toiling across the seas in any ship wherein he could find employment, first one, then the other, for poor wages and without one gleam of sunshine to cheer him. What a life! And--and it had seemed, only an hour ago, that all was likely to be so different. She, Bella Waldron--his love--no, not his! never his now--was being drawn towards him, she relied on him, trusted in him; but, henceforth, she would need him no more. This other had come back, would come back into her life again, and--he would go out of it for ever. God! it was bitter.

His hand, as he lifted it in his agony and let it fall again, struck against something hard in his pocket. Thrusting it into the pocket, he felt there the sailor's knife which he had found in the hold of the ship, and drew it forth, regarding it. It was a good knife, he found himself reflecting, a good knife. The man who owned it had kept it in excellent order, too; sharp and keen. How he must have railed at losing it. And he, Stephen, had found it! A good knife, long and stout-bladed, well pointed--a knife that would sever the stoutest cable or---! Men had been slain with worse weapons than this. A blow from it over the heart, under the left shoulder, and struck downwards--yes! such blows must be struck downwards, or otherwise they might fail--and a life could easily be taken. Easily--in a moment.

It was a good knife, he thought again. As he opened it and ran his finger along its tapering blade, and observed the thick, solid back which that blade possessed, he could not but acknowledge this. The man who had owned it and lost it had paid money for that knife. This was no slop-shop thing bought of a thievish Whitechapel or Houndsditch Jew who preyed on poor seamen. A good knife! He turned his head and looked at Gilbert Bampfyld lying there, still sleeping peacefully; looked at the man whom he had come out to seek, and--had found! Found as he had never expected to do, as he had never believed it possible he should do.

He looked at him, recognising all that his being there meant, all that this third human existence on the island, where formerly there had been but two persons, meant to him; the ruin that it cast upon his hopes. And again he regarded the knife, holding it by the tip, weighing it, balancing it. It was a good knife; one that would strike hard and sure.

And, as he so thought, he rose from his seat, went down to where the surf was beating violently now upon the beach, and flung the thing far off into the sea.

Then he returned to the sleeping man, and, kneeling by his side, shook his arm gently, saying:

'Come, Lieutenant Bampfyld. Come! Wake up, rouse yourself.'

CHAPTER XXV

I have loved my last.
And that love was my first.

'My God!' exclaimed Gilbert, as, beneath that light touch, he awoke and saw Stephen Charke by his side, 'is it a dream! You--you here! Saved! Thank God for all His mercies. I thought all were lost but me.'

Then, suddenly, even as he rose to his feet (limping on one of them, as Charke saw, and grasping the tamarind cudgel he had cut himself as though for support), he cried, lifting his other hand to his eyes--'But, Bella. Oh, Bella, my darling! Are,' he added hoarsely, 'any others saved besides yourself? Speak, put me out of my misery, one way or the other.'

He saw, he must have seen, the answer in Stephen Charke's eyes, for now he fell down on the leaves and grass at his feet and clasped his hands as though thanking Heaven fervently for its mercies. But he could not speak yet, nor for some moments, or only spoke to once more mutter incoherent words of thanksgiving for this last crowning mercy.

'Yes,' Charke said, and it seemed to himself as though his voice was tuneless, dead--as if it came from him with difficulty. 'Yes, she is saved; is safe. And she hopes always to see you again.'

'But how? How? For God's sake, tell me that. She was in the cabin--surely she was in the cabin--I left her there when I struggled to the wheel. How was she saved?'

'I,' said Charke, 'was enabled to help her. We got ashore together.'

'To help her!' Gilbert said, looking into his eyes. 'To help her! It was more than that, I know. I am a sailor as well as you; such help is no light thing. Should you not rather say you risked your life for hers? You could have done it in no other way.'

'No,' Charke said, 'I risked nothing. It was nothing. Any one could have done it.'

Again the other looked at him, knowing, feeling sure that the man before him was refusing to take any credit for what he had done. Then he said: 'Where is she? Can I see her at once, now? Soon?'

'She is not far. Within two miles from here; she awaits, hopes for, your coming.'

'Two miles! Heaven help me! I can scarcely crawl. Two miles, and I think my ankle is sprained.'

'She can come to you,' Charke replied, and the deadness, the lack of tone in his voice, the lifelessness of it, was apparent to the listener now, as well as to himself. 'I can fetch her.'

'Do! do! at once, I beseech you. Oh to see her, to see my girl again. Yet, still I do not understand. How could she hope to ever see me in life again, how await my coming? She could not dream, she could not dare to dream, that I might be saved.'

'She would not believe anything else. For myself,' Charke went on, scorning to say that which was not the case, 'I did not believe you could be saved. It seems to me now, as you stand before me, that a miracle must have been worked in your behalf. And I told her so, mincing no matters. I told her you must be dead. But she would not believe. Instead, she bade me, besought me to search this island, though, to be honest, I considered it useless to do so. Yesterday I took the other side, to-day this. And she was right. I--have found you.'

His tone was not aggressive, crisp and incisive though his words might be, yet there was something in the former, and, perhaps, the latter, which told Gilbert Bampfyld that the search he spoke of had been one of chivalrous obedience to a helpless woman's request, and not one made at his own desire. And he remembered how Bella had told him this man had loved her once, and had hoped for her love in return. Well, no matter, he had saved her at what must have been peril to his own life. He could not cavil at, nor feel hurt at, the coldness of his speech.

'What you have done,' he said, 'is more than words can repay; and, even though they were

sufficient, now is not the time for them. Mr. Charke, can you bring her to me?'

'I will go at once. But--but she will, undoubtedly, be anxious, excited to know something of how you were saved. As we return to you she will desire to be told everything; will be impatient to hear. What shall I tell her, over and above the greatest news of all, that you are restored to her?'

'There is not much to tell. As I was swept over the ship's side my hand touched the port quarter-boat which was being thrown out at the moment.'

'Ah! it has come ashore too.'

'And, naturally, I clutched at it. I would not let go; I held on like grim death, knowing that my only chance was in it. And, do you know, I found that I could see again; distinctly, or almost so. I could see the waves, the surf ahead; knew that some shore or coast was near. But, even as I recognised this, wondering, too, why at the moment when I was doomed to be drowned I should have this gift accorded me, I lost my hold on the boat and, a moment later, was thrown ashore or, at least, touched bottom. And--and it was a hard fight; I never thought to win through it. Each recoil of the waves tore me back again only to find myself thrown forward with the next. Three times it happened. Then--then, at last, when I knew that, on the next occasion, I should have no breath left in my body, I was flung still farther on land than I had been before, and, this time, I determined I would not be dragged back alive, so I dug my foot and hands into the soft sand. I wrestled with those waves and I beat them. They receded, leaving me spread-eagled on the shingle, free of them for a moment, and, ere they could return and catch me again, I had scrambled out of their reach.'

'Was that here, on this spot where we are now?'

'No, it was farther that way, between a mile and two miles farther.' And, as Gilbert Bampfyld spoke, he pointed with the stick in the direction where Bella Waldron and Stephen Charke had taken up their quarters since they had got ashore. Therefore, her lover had been close to them once, and they had never known it! 'I stayed there one night,' Gilbert went on, 'then feeling sure there were islands to the north--as there must be, you know--I came this way. Only, I slipped on the beach and, I think, sprained my ankle, so that I could get no farther.'

'God has been very good to you,' Stephen said, 'and to her. Now I will go and bring her here: it will not take long. Soon, very soon, you will be together. You will be happy. In a couple of hours she will be here. It would, perhaps, be in less time than that, only, you observe, the sea is rising and the surf getting very high. We must come inland, above, by the cliffs. Farewell till then.'

'Farewell. God bless you. Ah, Mr. Charke, if you could only know my gratitude to you for saving her, also what happiness you have brought into my life again. If you could only know that!'

But Charke was on his way back to where he had left Bella almost before Gilbert had concluded his sentence, and, beyond a backward wave of his hand, had made no acknowledgment of his words.

He climbed up to the summit of the cliffs easily enough, for by now all his strength had come back to him, and he felt as vigorous as he had ever done in his life. Yet, when he gained the top, he noticed that there was still something wanting, some of the spring and elasticity which had characterised the manner in which he had returned to Bella yesterday from the other side of the island. Why was this, he asked himself? Why? But he could find no answer to the question.

Yet, perhaps, his musings on what he had heard half an hour before were sufficient to have driven all the life, all the hope, out of him. His musings on the change that this last half-hour had brought into his future. God! his future.

'He was there, close to us,' he reflected, 'and we neither of us knew nor dreamt of it. I could have sworn it was impossible he should be saved. She--well, she did not dare to hope. And for two days! For two days he has been close to us, and--and in those two days what have I not pictured to myself, what dreams have I not had! What a fool's paradise I have been imagining for myself. Now, there is nothing before me. Nothing--now, or ever.'

But still he forced himself to stride on, passing sometimes beneath the cocoa trees that grew on the little upland, sometimes through open glades in which the morning sun beat down upon his head with a fierceness only inferior to the strength it would assume an hour or so later--yet he heeded nothing. He felt that he must reach Bella as soon as possible and tell her everything. There was no more joy left in existence for him, but he was the bearer of news that would give her joy extreme, and--he loved her. Because he did so he would not keep that news from her one moment longer than was necessary. 'Yet,' he whispered to himself, while thinking thus, 'she would have come to love me in his place some day, she would--she must. I divined it, saw it. Now, it will never be. Never. My God! it is a long word.'

Then he braced himself up still more and went on, until he stood upon the summit of the little elevation which rose behind the spot that they had made their resting-place.

Perhaps she had seen him returning; perhaps she had had some divination of his approach,

since he perceived that she was coming towards him and was mounting the ascent to meet him, her head protected by the cap of the drowned sailor, while, over it, she held with one hand a great palm leaf to protect her from the sun. Then, as they approached each other, she gave a gasp--it was almost a shriek, and cried out:

'Mr. Charke! Mr. Charke! What is the matter? What has happened? You are ghastly pale beneath your bronze. And--and your face is changed. What is it?'

'I come,' he said,--and now she gave another gasp, for his voice was changed too,--'as the bearer of good--of great tidings. Of---, and he paused. For as he spoke she, too, had turned white. Then, raising both her hands to her breast, she stood panting before him.

'He is saved!' she said. 'He is saved! Gilbert is saved. Is that it? Are those the tidings?'

'Yes,' he answered. 'Yes. He is saved.'

For a moment she stood before him, her hands still raised to her bosom, then, suddenly, she swayed forward and would have fallen but that he caught her in his arms, and, an instant later, had laid her on the soft grass, while he ran down to the rivulet to fetch some water to revive her.

This happened directly after he had returned, but, when he had bathed her forehead and moistened her lips with the water, she soon sat up, saying: 'Come, let us go to him. At once. We must go at once. Yet--why does he not come to me?'

'He has hurt his foot. But it is nothing. Only a sprain. If you are recovered from your swoon let us set out. It is not far. We shall be there soon.' Whereon he gave her his hand and assisted her to rise, repeating that it was best to set out at once. And then they did so, he offering his arm to assist her up the slope, while explaining that, owing to the increased roughness of the sea, it was impossible to proceed by the beach to where her lover was. And, next, he began the account of how he found Gilbert, and went through with it almost uninterruptedly, she listening without saying a word beyond now and again exclaiming, 'Poor Gilbert!' or 'Thank God!' Indeed, her silence during his narrative was such that more than once he glanced down at her, while wondering at that which seemed listlessness on her part.

Yet he would have wronged her deeply had he really believed her listless, since Bella Waldron would have been no true, honest, English girl had she by this time become indifferent to the news that her betrothed was saved. Indeed, in her heart she was thanking God again and again, and far more often than she was giving outward utterance to those thanks, for having saved her lover and preserved him to her--only! Only what? Only, that she knew how, with their restored happiness, there had come to this other man--to him to whom she owed her life and, with it, the possibility of being once more united to Gilbert--a broken heart and the destruction of every hope of happiness that he had cherished. She could see it in his face, hear it in his voice, discern it even by the manner in which he walked by her side. That which she knew he hoped for could never have been, she told herself; never, never, never! Had Gilbert died, still it could never have been; none could ever have taken his place.

But, she was a woman with a true woman's heart in her breast--and her pity was womanly--sublime.

CHAPTER XXVI

["Here is my journey's end, here is my butt,
And very seamark of my utmost sail."](#)

They had progressed so far towards the cliffs above the little bay or cove, where Gilbert was, that now they had but to cross the summit of one more spur and then they would be able to descend to him.

'You will see him soon now,' Charke said to the girl, 'very soon. Then you will be happy. To-night, he and I will arrange the signals that may bring some succour to us. At any rate, it cannot be long in coming. If we are where I think, hundreds of ships pass near here annually. And, at the worst, one may live here very well for some time.'

She heard his words, she missed no tone nor inflection of his voice--but she could not answer him. It was impossible. For, though he spoke on subjects which were appropriate enough to their

surroundings, she knew that his speech, instead of conveying his thoughts, was only used to hide them; and that beneath what he said lay a sadness too deep for utterance. Therefore, she made no attempt at reply, but contented herself with letting her eyes rest on his face now and again, and then withdrawing them directly afterwards.

Suddenly, however, and after having cast a glance backwards across the little plateau which they had passed along, he exclaimed:

'Why, Lieutenant Bampfylde will find another companion of his in the poor old *Emperor* here to greet him. See, there comes Bengalee, behind us. How has he broken away from the cable? It was stout enough to hold a small frigate,' and, as she turned to look in the direction he had indicated, she saw the tiger-cub coming after them along the plateau at a considerable pace. Coming swiftly, too, and always with the lithe and hateful sinuosity which marks the progress of the species.

Then, as she, too, turned and saw its striped body winding in and out beneath the tamarind and palm trees, she remembered that she had observed it gnawing at the cable ere she set out, and told Stephen so. And she also told him that it had seemed much excited at being left behind, and had made considerable struggles to break loose when she moved away.

'It will perhaps be appeased,' he answered, 'when it finds itself once more with you. Poor wretch! its hunger must be frightful. Yet--yet--how else to kill it? And killed it must be.'

'I wish,' she said again, as she had so often said before, 'that I had never asked to have it saved. It would have been better to have let it die in the sea.'

'Perhaps,' he answered. 'Perhaps. We can, however, leave it here when we get taken off, and then it must take its chance.'

They were now upon the last ridge of the spur beneath which he had left Gilbert, and he told her that, in another moment, she would see him by looking down. 'Indeed,' he said, 'if you glance over now you can see him, I imagine.'

Then he bade her hold his hand and lean over the lip of the precipice, and trace the run of the hill seawards. Following his instructions, she did so, when suddenly, below, they heard a rattling, a sliding as of a mass of earth and stones slipping, and he felt a slight withdrawal, a sinking of the ground, beneath their feet. He felt it and understood its significance in an instant, while recalling the masses of fallen chalk and earth which he had observed lying at the foot of this and other cliffs earlier in the day.

'Back,' he cried, 'Back!' while, as he did so, he seized Bella with his other hand as well as the one she already held, and sprang away from the ridge, the violence of his action causing her to fall on her knees. Yet, still knowing her danger--their danger--he dragged her back and saved her. Though not a moment too soon--not an instant!--for, as he clutched at her, the earth for a foot or so in front of them--the very portion of it on which they had been standing! the very portion, indeed, across which he had but now drawn her--gave way. It gave way, broke off in a long line, and fell with a crash to the depths below, leaving an abyss above the spot over which he had drawn her.

'My God!' she gasped, 'you have saved my life again! Again--ah!'

That last exclamation was, in truth, a shriek of dismay, of awful agony, of terror in the extreme. For she, whose face was towards the way they had come, as his back was towards it, saw that which he had no knowledge of; that which paralysed her, struck her an instant after dumb with horror.

She saw the tiger-cub close behind him and crouching for a spring, she saw its devilish eyes gleaming like topazes, and she saw its body hurled with tremendous force towards Charke as he stood looking down on her.

Full at him it sprang, its savage jaws open and its forelegs extended. And it partly missed him through passing on his left side, yet not doing so altogether. Instead, it struck his left shoulder, spinning him round like a drunken, reeling man, and causing him to stagger backwards towards the chasm and, with a gasp, to fall over it and disappear.

And Bella, left alone in that awful moment--for the tiger's leap had carried it far over the cliff and to its own destruction--saw a man below--her lover--shouting and gesticulating--and then she knew no more.

* * * * *

An hour later, Stephen Charke lay on his back below the cliff, his eyes upturned to the sun, which was by now peeping over the hill and illuminating all the little valley with its rays--he lay there breathing his last and with his back broken. By his side knelt Bella Waldron, while Gilbert Bampfylde stood near, their faces the true index of their sorrow.

'No,' Stephen whispered hoarsely, now, in answer to a question from her. 'No. I feel no pain,

nothing but the numbness of my back and lower limbs. Nay, nay, do not weep.' Then he lowered the poor, feeble voice a little more and whispered even more calmly to her--'I am content, well content. And--it--is better so. There was no life, no future for me.'

'Oh!' she said, wringing her hands while the tears streamed from her eyes and dropped upon his upturned face. 'Oh! that you should have died in saving me. That you, whom I honour so, should die at all--young, strong, as you are. And through the outcome of my wilfulness, of my letting that creature be saved. Saved to slay you. Ah! God, it is too hard!'

'It thought,' he said, after a pause, during which she wiped the drops from his forehead and moistened his lips, 'that I was attacking you. Doubtless it did so. It hated me and loved you.' Then, he added to himself, 'As all love you.'

'Gilbert,' she shrieked now to her lover, 'Gilbert, can nothing be done; nothing to save him? Ah! perhaps his back is not broken; it may be but a terrible fall--he may recover yet. Can we do nothing?'

But it was Stephen who answered, 'Nothing.'

'Old chap,' said Gilbert, also close by him now, and kneeling down to take his hand, 'is--is there anything you want done; any message sent to any one at home? Only say the word. You know you can depend on me.'

'If it can be,' the dying man said, and now his voice was very low, almost inaudible, 'if you can have it done later, when you are found, bury me--at--the--spot where she and I--came ashore. There, in the little knoll. You know.' And his eyes sought hers. 'That is where I want--to lie--until we meet again.'

They could not answer him, their voices were no longer their own; hardly could they see him through their tears, but still they were able to tell him by their gestures that it should be as he desired. After which Gilbert managed to rise to his feet and whisper in Bella's ears, 'He is--going--now. The end is close at hand. Say--say "goodbye" to him, and--and kiss him. He deserves it from you, and--I shall not grudge it.' Then, in his manliness, he turned away from them.

Perhaps the dying man guessed what had been said; and, because he knew his hour had come, he opened his eyes for the last time and gazed wistfully at her.

'Goodbye,' he said. 'Farewell.'

'Goodbye. Oh, God! that I should have to say it to you. Goodbye--goodbye, Stephen,' and she stooped down and kissed the cold, white lips of the man who had loved her so. And, next, she put her arm beneath his neck and let his head lie on it, while, amidst the tempest of her sobs, she heard him murmur feebly:

'I loved you--from--the first--moment. I love--you--now.'

Then his head turned over on her arm and lay there motionless.

* * * * *

The wedding was over, Gilbert Bampfyld and Bella were man and wife, the marriage having taken place at Capetown. While the only difference between the ceremony and that which had been originally intended was that the Archbishop of Capetown joined their hands instead of the Bishop of Bombay doing so. Therefore, at last, these two loving hearts were made happy, and, in spite of all that had threatened both Bella and her lover during the past few months, the future now looked bright and cheerful.

Not three days had elapsed since Stephen Charke's death when Gilbert (who, with Bella, sat from sunrise to sunset beneath a clump of cocoa trees on the highest point to which they could attain, he being soon able to reach it quite easily by the aid of his cudgel and owing to the rapid improvement in the sprain he had suffered from) saw a vessel not two miles away from the island.

'And I swear,' he exclaimed, 'one of Her Majesty's cruisers. Look at those yellow funnels, one aft of the other. That's a cruiser right enough. I wonder if it's the *Briseus*.'

Then he fell to making every kind of signal which he could devise when unprovided with the means of attracting her attention either by pistol-shot or fire, and in about half an hour they had the joy of seeing one of her cutters manned and lowered, and, a moment later, making for the shore.

The cruiser turned out to be the *Clytie*, on her way home from Calcutta to Plymouth, and, even as the cutter fetched the shore, the coxswain recognised Gilbert as an officer with whom he had previously served. Then he furnished him with the intelligence that he was reported dead.

'Not yet,' said Gilbert; 'though, since I left the *Briseus*, when in charge of her whaler, I have had two narrow escapes. Unfortunately, others, with whom I have been in company, are so.' Then, briefly, he told the man all that had happened to him, and stated that he was going to ask the captain of the *Clytie* for a passage for himself and his future wife, the young lady by his side.

First, however, there was one thing to be done--namely, to bury Stephen Charke in the place which he had indicated. This was a thing which would now be very easy of accomplishment, since the sea was perfectly calm again and the body could be easily carried from the spot where he had fallen to that where he desired to be buried. But, to begin with, the permission of the captain had to be obtained, which was done by signalling, and then the rest was easy. Some more men were sent off in the second cutter, with the chaplain as well as some spades for digging a grave, after which the sailors marched under Gilbert's command to where he and Bella had covered up Stephen Charke's remains with palm and other leaves that were within their reach, and then removed the body. And very reverently was the interment performed, all standing round the spot with the exception of Bella, who was so overcome that she had to be led away from the grave.

And so they laid him in it; and there, in the little solitary island, they left him to his long sleep.

Perhaps, nothing so much as his death--not even his heroism in the stricken ship, nor his masterful strength in fighting the storm and the waves, and in succeeding at the risk of his own life in saving that of the woman whom he so tenderly loved--kept his memory green in both their hearts. Perhaps, too, that last sacrifice which he made--his life!--at the moment when once more he was preserving hers, furnishes the reason which again and again prompts Gilbert to say to his wife, in a voice always full of a tone of regret for the brave man who lies so far away:

'After all, Bella, I am not sure that you chose the right one. Poor Stephen Charke was the better man of the two.'

Yet, when he observes the glance she gives him in return, he is comforted by knowing that, in no circumstances, could that other have ever won her heart as he did.

FOOTNOTES

[Footnote 1](#): This is not fictitious. M. Constant made his speech to the Chamber of Deputies on June 17, 1820, and it contained all attributed to it above. It described how the crew of *Le Rôdeur* were themselves struck down one by one soon after the outbreak among the slaves, how many of the slaves were flung overboard to save the cost of supporting them, and also how, while the ship was subject to this terrible calamity, a Spanish slaver, named the *Leon*, spoke her, asking for assistance, as almost every one on board her was stricken with sudden blindness. *Le Rôdeur*, the account went on to say, eventually reached Guadaloupe with only *one* man left who was not smitten, and he became blind directly after he had brought the vessel into harbour. The Spaniard was never heard of again.

>THE END

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SEAFARERS ***

Updated editions will replace the previous one—the old editions will be renamed.

Creating the works from print editions not protected by U.S. copyright law means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works to protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG™ concept and trademark. Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you charge for an eBook, except by following the terms of the trademark license, including paying royalties for use of the Project Gutenberg trademark. If you do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the trademark license is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and

research. Project Gutenberg eBooks may be modified and printed and given away—you may do practically ANYTHING in the United States with eBooks not protected by U.S. copyright law. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

START: FULL LICENSE
THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG LICENSE
PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE YOU DISTRIBUTE OR USE THIS WORK

To protect the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting the free distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the phrase “Project Gutenberg”), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg™ License available with this file or online at www.gutenberg.org/license.

Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg™ electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. “Project Gutenberg” is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg™ electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg™ electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation (“the Foundation” or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™ works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg™ name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs

1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.”
- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.
- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.
- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability

to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you 'AS-IS', WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™'s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations (\$1 to \$5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.