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MRS. FALCHION

By Gilbert Parker

INTRODUCTION

This novel was written in the days of the three-decker, and it went out to sea as such. Every novel of mine written until 1893 was published in two or three volumes, and the sale to the libraries was greater than the sale to the general public. This book was begun in 1892 at the time when the Pierre stories were being written, and it was finished in the summer of 1893. It did not appear serially; indeed, I made no attempt at serial publication. I had a feeling that as it was to be my first novel, it should be judged as a whole and taken at a gasp, as it were. I believe that the reader of Messrs. Methuen & Company was not disposed to publish the book, but Mr. Methuen himself (or Mr. Stedman as he was then called) was impressed by it and gave it his friendly confidence. He was certain that it would arrest the attention of the critics and of the public, whether it became popular or not. I have not a set of those original three volumes. I wish I had, because they won for me an almost unhopèd-for pleasure. The 'Daily Chronicle' gave the volumes over a column of review, and headed the notice, "A Coming Novelist." The 'Athenaeum' said that 'Mrs. Falchion' was a splendid study of character; 'The Pall Mall Gazette' said that the writing was as good as anything that had been done in our time, while at the same time it took rather a dark view of my future as a novelist, because it said I had not probed deep enough into the wounds of character which I had inflicted. The article was written by Mr. George W. Stevens, and he was right in saying that I had not probed deep enough. Few very young men—and I was very young then—do probe very deeply. At the appearance of 'When Valmond Came to Pontiac', however, Mr. Stevens came to the conclusion that my future was assured.

I mention these things because they were burnt into my mind at the time. 'Mrs. Falchion' was my first real novel, as I have said, though it had been preceded by a short novel called 'The Chief Factor', since rescued from publication and never published in book form in England. I realised when I had written

'Mrs. Falchion' that I had not found my metier, and I was fearful of complete failure. I had come but a few years before from the South Seas; I was full of what I had seen and felt; I was eager to write of it all, and I did write of it; but the thing which was deeper still in me was the life which 'Pierre and His People', 'The Seats of the Mighty', 'The Trail of the Sword', 'The Lane That Had no Turning', and 'The Right of Way' portrayed. That life was destined to give me an assured place and public, while 'Mrs. Falchion', and the South Sea stories published in various journals before the time of its production, and indeed anterior to the writing of the Pierre series, only assured me attention.

Happily for the book, which has faults of construction, superficialities as to incident, and with some crudity of plot, it was, in the main, a study of character. There was focus, there was illumination in the book, to what degree I will not try to say; and the attempt to fasten the mind of the reader upon the central figure, and to present that central figure in many aspects, safeguarded the narrative from the charge of being a mere novel of adventure, or, as one writer called it, "an impudent melodrama, which has its own fascinations."

Reading Mrs. Falchion again after all these years, I seem to realise in it an attempt to combine the objective and subjective methods of treatment—to combine analysis of character and motive with arresting episode. It is a difficult thing to do, as I have found. It was not done on my part wholly by design, but rather by instinct, and I imagine that this tendency has run through all my works. It represents the elements of romanticism and of realism in one, and that kind of representation has its dangers, to say nothing of its difficulties. It sometimes alienates the reader, who by instinct and preference is a realist, and it troubles the reader who wants to read for a story alone, who cares for what a character does, and not for what a character is or says, except in so far as it emphasises what it does. One has to work, however, in one's own way, after one's own idiosyncrasies, and here is the book that represents one of my own idiosyncrasies in its most primitive form.

CONTENTS:

BOOK I

BELOW THE SUN LINE

I. THE GATES OF THE SEA

II. "MOTLEY IS YOUR ONLY WEAR"

III. A TALE OF NO MAN'S SEA

IV. THE TRAIL OF THE ISHMAELITE

V. ACCUSING FACES

VI. MUMMERS ALL

VII. THE WHEEL COMES FULL CIRCLE

VIII. A BRIDGE OF PERIL

IX. "THE PROGRESS OF THE SUNS"

X. BETWEEN DAY AND DARK

BOOK II

THE SLOPE OF THE PACIFIC

XI. AMONG THE HILLS OF GOD

XII. THE WHIRLIGIG OF TIME

XIII. THE SONG OF THE SAW

XIV. THE PATH OF THE EAGLE

XV. IN THE TROUGH OF THE WINDS

XVI. A DUEL IN ARCADY

XVII. RIDING THE REEFS

XVIII. THE STRINGS OF DESTINY

XIX. THE SENTENCE

XX. AFTER THE STORM

XXI. IN PORT

BOOK I

BELOW THE SUN LINE

CHAPTER I

THE GATES OF THE SEA

The part I played in Mrs. Falchion's career was not very noble, but I shall set it forth plainly here, else I could not have the boldness to write of her faults or those of others. Of my own history little need be said in preface. Soon after graduating with honours as a physician, I was offered a professional post in a college of medicine in Canada. It was difficult to establish a practice in medicine without some capital, else I had remained in London; and, being in need of instant means, I gladly accepted the offer. But six months were to intervene before the beginning of my duties—how to fill that time profitably was the question. I longed to travel, having scarcely been out of England during my life. Some one suggested the position of surgeon on one of the great steamers running between England and Australia. The idea of a long sea-voyage was seductive, for I had been suffering from over-study, though the position itself was not very distinguished. But in those days I cared more for pleasing myself than for what might become a newly-made professor, and I was prepared to say with a renowned Irish dean: "Dignity and I might be married, for all the relations we are."

I secured the position with humiliating ease and humiliating smallness of pay. The steamer's name was the 'Fulvia'. It was one of the largest belonging to the Occidental Company. It carried no emigrants and had a passenger list of fashionable folk. On the voyage out to Australia the weather was pleasant, save in the Bay of Biscay; there was no sickness on board, and there were many opportunities for social gaiety, the cultivation of pleasant acquaintances, and the encouragement of that brisk idleness which aids to health. This was really the first holiday in my life, and I enjoyed it thoroughly. Nothing of unusual interest occurred on the outward voyage; for one thing, because there were no unusual people among the passengers; for another, because the vessel behaved admirably. The same cannot be said of the return voyage: and with it my story really begins. Misfortune followed us out of Sydney harbour. We broke a crank-shaft between there and Port Phillip, Melbourne; a fire in the hold occurred at Adelaide; and at Albany we buried a passenger who had died of consumption one day out from King George's Sound. At Colombo, also, we had a misfortune, but it was of a peculiar kind, and did not obtrude itself at once; it was found in an addition to our passenger list. I had spent a day in exploring Colombo—visiting Arabi Pasha, inspecting Hindu temples, watching the jugglers and snake-charmers, evading guides and the sellers of brummagem jewellery, and idling in the Cinnamon Gardens. I returned to the ship tired out. After I had done some official duties, I sauntered to the gangway, and, leaning against the bulwarks, idly watched the passengers come on board from the tender. Two of these made an impression on me. One was a handsome and fashionably-dressed woman, who was followed by a maid or companion (as I fancied), carrying parcels; the other, a shabbily-dressed man, who was the last to come up from the tender. The woman was going down the companion-way when he stepped on deck with a single bag in his hand, and I noticed that he watched her with a strange look in his eyes. He stood still as he gazed, and remained so for a moment after she had gone; then he seemed to recover himself, and started, as I thought, almost guiltily, when he saw that my attention was attracted. He

nervously shifted his bag from one hand to the other, and looked round as though not certain of where he should go. A steward came to him officiously, and patronisingly too,—which is the bearing of servants to shabbily-dressed people,—but he shook his head, caught his bag smartly away from the steward's fingers, and moved towards the after part of the ship, reserved for intermediate passengers. As he went he hesitated, came to the side of the vessel, looked down at the tender for a moment, cast his eyes to where the anchor was being weighed, made as if he would go back to the tender, then, seeing that the ladder was now drawn up, sighed, and passed on to the second-class companion-way, through which he disappeared.

I stood commenting idly to myself upon this incident, which, slight though it was, appeared to have significance of a kind, when Hungerford, the fifth officer, caught me slyly by the arm and said, "Lucky fellow! Nothing to do but watch the world go by. I wish I had you in the North Atlantic on a whaler, or in the No Man's Sea on a pearl-smack for a matter of thirty days."

"What would come of that, Hungerford?" said I.

"An exchange of matter for mind, Marmion; muscle for meditation, physics for philosophy."

"You do me too much honour; at present I've neither mind, meditation, nor philosophy; I am simply vegetating."

"Which proves you to be demoralised. I never saw a surgeon on a ship who wasn't. They began with mind—more or less—they ate the fruits of indolence, got precious near being sinful as well as indolent, and ended with cheap cynicism, with the old 'quid refert'—the thing Hamlet plagiarised in his, 'But it is no matter.'"

"Isn't this an unusual occupation for you, Hungerford—this Swift-like criticism?"

"Swift-like, is it? You see, I've practised on many of your race, Marmion, and I have it pat now. You are all of two classes—those who sicken in soul and leave after one trip, and those who make another trip and are lost."

"Lost? How?"

Hungerford pressed his fingers hard on my breastbone, looked at me enigmatically from under his well-hung brows, and replied: "Brains put out to seed, morals put out to vegetate—that's 'lost.'"

"What about fifth officers?"

"Fifth officers work like navvies, and haven't time for foolishness. They've got to walk the bridge, and practise the boats, and be responsible for luggage—and here I am talking to you like an infallible undergraduate, while the lascars are in endless confusion with a half-dozen pieces of baggage, and the first officer foams because I'm not there to set them right. I leave you to your dreams. Good-bye."

Hungerford was younger than myself, but he knew the world, and I was flattered by these uncommon remarks, because he talked to no one else on the ship in the same way. He never sought to make friends, had a thorough contempt for social trifling, and shrugged his shoulders at the "swagger" of some of the other officers. I think he longed for a different kind of sea-life, so accustomed had he been to adventurous and hardy ways. He had entered the Occidental service because he had fallen in love with a pretty girl, and thought it his duty to become a "regular," and thus have the chance of seeing her every three months in London. He had conceived a liking for me, reciprocated on my part; the more so, because I knew that behind his blunt exterior there was a warm and manly heart. When he left me I went to my cabin and prepared for dinner, laughing as I did so at his keen, uncompromising criticism, which I knew was correct enough; for of all official posts that of a ship-surgeon is least calculated to make a man take a pride in existence. At its best, it is assisting in the movement of a panorama; at its worst, worse than a vegetation. Hungerford's solicitude for myself, however, was misplaced, because this one voyage would end my career as ship-surgeon, and, besides, I had not vegetated, but had been interested in everything that had occurred, humdrum as it was. With these thoughts, I looked out of the port-hole, to see the shores of Colombo, Galle Face, and Mount Lavinia fading in the distance, and heard seven bells—the time for dinner. When I took my seat at the table of which I was the head, my steward handed to me a slip of paper, saying that the chief steward had given a new passenger, a lady, the seat at my right hand, which had been vacated at Colombo. The name on the paper was "Mrs. Falchion." The seat was still empty, and I wondered if this was the beautiful passenger who had attracted me and interested the Intermediate Passenger. I was selfish enough to wish so: and it was so.

We had finished the soup before she entered. The chief steward, with that anxious civility which beauty can inspire in even so great a personage, conducted her to her seat beside me. I confess that though I was at once absorbed in this occurrence, I noticed also that some of the ladies present smiled

significantly when they saw at whose table Mrs. Falchion was placed, and looked not a little ironically at the purser, who, as it was known, always tried to get for his table the newest addition to the passenger list—when it was a pretty woman. I believe that one or two rude people chaffed the chief steward about "favouring the doctor"; but he had a habit of saying uncomfortable things in a deferential way, and they did not pursue the subject. Then they commiserated the purser, who was an unpleasant little Jew of an envious turn of mind; and he, as I was told, likened me to Sir John Falstaff. I was sensitive in those days, and this annoyed me, particularly that I had had nothing to do with placing Mrs. Falchion at my table. We are always most sensitive when guilty concerning the spirit and not the letter.

One who has lived the cosmopolitan life of London should be quick at detecting nationalities, but I found it difficult, even after I heard her speak, to guess at Mrs. Falchion's native land. There were good reasons for this, as may be duly seen. Her appearance in the saloon caused an instant buzz of admiration and interest, of which she seemed oblivious. If it was acting, it was good acting; if it was lack of self-consciousness, it was remarkable. As I soon came to know, it was the latter—which, in such a woman, increased the remarkableness. I was inclined at first to venture the opinion that she was an actress; but I discovered that she possessed the attracting power of an actress without the calculated manner of one; her very lack of self-consciousness was proof of this emancipation.

When she sat down, I immediately welcomed her by name to my table. The only surprise she showed at my knowledge of her name and my self-introduction was to lift her head slightly and look at me, as if wondering whether I was likely to be an inquisitive and troublesome host; and also, as I thought, to measure me according to her measure. It was a quick look, and the interest she showed was of a passive kind. She asked me as she might an old acquaintance—or a waiter—if the soup was good, and what the fish was like; decided on my recommendation to wait for the entrees; requested her next neighbour to pass the olives; in an impersonal way began to talk about the disadvantages of life at sea; regretted that all ship food tasted alike; wondered if the cook knew how to make a Russian salad; and added that the menu was a national compromise.

Now that she was close to me, I could see that her beauty was real and notable. Her features were regular, her eyes of a greyish violet, her chin strong, yet not too strong—the chin of a singer; her hands had that charming quiet certainty of movement possessed by so few; and her colour was of the most delightful health. In this delightful health, in her bountiful yet perfect physical eloquence, her attractiveness, as it seemed to me, chiefly lay. For no one would ever have guessed her to possess an emotional temperament. All that was outer was fascinating, all that was inner suggested coldness. After experience assured me that all who came to know her shared this estimate, even in those days when every man on the ship was willing to be her slave. She had a compelling atmosphere, a possessive presence; and yet her mind at this time was unemotional—like Octavia, the wife of Mark Antony, "of a cold conversation." She was striking and unusual in appearance, and yet well within convention and "good form." Her dress was simply and modestly worn, and had little touches of grace and taste which, I understand, many ladies on board sought to imitate, when they recovered from the first feeling of envy.

She was an example of splendid life. I cared to look at her as one would dwell on the sleek beauty of a deer—as, indeed, I have many a time since then, in India, watched a tigress asleep on her chain, claws hidden, wild life latent but slumbering. I could have staked my life that Mrs. Falchion was insensible to love or passion, and unimpeachable in the broad scheme of right and wrong; imperious in requiring homage, incapable of giving it. I noticed when she laughed, as she did once at table, that her teeth were very white and small and square; and, like a schoolgirl, she had a habit of clicking them together very lightly, but not conspicuously, as if trying their quality. This suggested, however, something a little cruel. Her appetite was very good. She was coolly anxious about the amusements; she asked me if I could get her a list of the passengers, said that she was never sea-sick, and took a languid interest in the ladies present. Her glance at the men was keen at first, then neutral.

Once again, during the meal, she slowly turned and flashed an inquiring glance at me. I caught her eyes. She did not show the least embarrassment, and asked me if the band insisted on playing every day. Before she left the saloon, one could see that many present were talking about her. Even the grim old captain followed her with his eyes as she went. When she rose, I asked her if she was going on deck. I did it casually, as though it was her usual custom to appear there after dinner. In like fashion she replied that her maid had some unpacking to do, she had some things to superintend, and, when this was done, she intended to spend a time on deck. Then, with a peculiar smile, she passed out.

[Note by Dr. Marmion appended to his MSS.—"Many of the conversations and monologues in this history, not heard by myself when they occurred, were told to me afterwards, or got from the diaries and notes of the persons concerned. Only a few are purely imaginary."]

CHAPTER II

"MOTLEY IS YOUR ONLY WEAR"

I went to my cabin, took a book, sat down, and began to smoke. My thoughts drifted from the book, and then occurred a strange, incongruous thing. It was a remembered incident. It came like a vision as I was lighting a fresh cigar:

A boy and a girl in a village chemist's shop; he with a boy's love for her, she responding in terms, but not in fact. He passed near her carrying a measure of sulphuric acid. She put out her hand suddenly and playfully, as though to bar his way. His foot slipped on the oily floor, and the acid spilled on his hands and the skirt of her dress. He turned instantly and plunged his hands into a measure of alcohol standing near before the acid had more than slightly scalded them. She glanced at his startled face; hers was without emotion. She looked down, and said petulantly: "You have spoiled my dress; I cannot go into the street."

The boy's clothes were burnt also. He was poor, and to replace them must be a trial to him; her father owned the shop, and was well-to-do. Still, he grieved most that she should be annoyed, though he saw her injustice. But she turned away and left him.

Another scene then crossed the disc of smoke:

The boy and girl, now man and woman, standing alone in the chemist's shop. He had come out of the big working world, after travel in many countries. His fame had come with him. She was to be married the next day to a seller of purple and fine linen. He was smiling a good-bye, and there was nothing of the old past in the smile. The flame now was in her eyes, and she put out both her hands to stop him as he turned to go; but his face was passionless. "You have spoiled my heart," she said; "I cannot go into the world so."

"It is too late; the measures are empty," he replied.

"I love you to-day, I will loathe you to-morrow," was the answer.

But he turned and left her, and she blindly stretched out her hands and followed him into the darkness, weeping.

Was it the scent of the chemicals in my cabin, coupled with some subterranean association of things, which brought these scenes vividly before me at this moment? What had they to do with Mrs. Falchion?

A time came when the occurrence appeared to me in the light of prescience, but that was when I began to understand that all ideas, all reason and philosophy, are the result of outer impression. The primal language of our minds is in the concrete. Afterwards it becomes the cypher, and even at its highest it is expressed by angles, lines, and geometrical forms—substances and allusive shapes. But now, as the scene shifted by, I had involuntarily thrust forward my hands as did the girl when she passed out into the night, and, in doing so, touched the curtain of my cabin door swinging in towards me. I recovered myself, and a man timidly stepped inside, knocking as he did so. It was the Intermediate Passenger. His face was pale; he looked ill.

Poor as his dress was, I saw that he had known the influences and practised the graces of good society, though his manner was hesitating and anxious now. I knew at a glance that he was suffering from both physical pain and mental worry. Without a word, I took his wrist and felt his pulse, and he said: "I thought I might venture to come—"

I motioned him not to speak. I counted the irregular pulse-beats, then listened to the action of his heart, with my ear to his breast. There lay his physical trouble. I poured out a dose of digitalis, and, handing it to him, asked him to sit down. As he sat and drank the medicine, I rapidly studied him. The chin was firm, and the eyes had a dogged, persistent look that, when turned on you, saw not you, but something beyond you. The head was thrown slightly forward, the eyes looking up at an angle. This last action was habitual with him. It gave him a peculiar earnestness. As I noted these peculiarities, my mind was also with his case; I saw that his life was threatened. Perhaps he guessed what was going on in me, for he said in a low, cultured voice: "The wheels will stop too long some time, and there will be no rebound;" —referring to the irregular action of his heart.

"Perhaps that is true," I said; "yet it depends a good deal upon yourself when it will be. Men can die if they wish without committing suicide. Look at the Maori, the Tongan, the Malay. They can also prolong life (not indefinitely, but in a case like yours considerably), if they choose. You can lengthen your days if

you do not brood on fatal things —fatal to you; if you do not worry yourself into the grave."

I knew that something of this was platitude, and that counsel to such a man must be of a more possible cast, if it is to be followed. I was aware also that, in nine cases out of ten, worry is not a voluntary or constitutional thing, but springs from some extraneous cause.

He smiled faintly, raised his head a little higher, and said: "Yes, that's just it, I suppose; but then we do not order our own constitutions; and I believe, Doctor, that you must kill a nerve before it ceases to hurt. One doesn't choose to worry, I think, any more than one chooses to lay bare a nerve." And then his eyes dropped, as if he thought he had already said too much.

Again I studied him, repeating my definitions in my mind. He was not a drunkard; he might have had no vice, so free was his face from any sign of dissipation or indulgence; but there was suffering, possibly the marks of some endured shame. The suffering and shadows showed the more because his features were refined enough for a woman. And altogether it struck me that he was possessed by some one idea, which gave his looks a kind of sorrowful eloquence, such as one sees on occasion in the face of a great actor like Salvini, on the forehead of a devout Buddhist, or in the eyes of a Jesuit missionary who martyrs himself in the wilds.

I felt at once for the man a sympathy, a brotherliness, the causes of which I should be at a loss to trace. Most people have this experience at one time or another in their lives. It is not a matter of sex; it may be between an old man and a little child, a great man and a labourer, a schoolgirl and an old native woman. There is in such companionships less self-interest than in any other. As I have said, I thought that this man had a trouble, and I wished to know it; not from curiosity,—though my mind had a selfish, inquiring strain,—but because I hoped I might be able to help him in some way. I put my hand on his shoulder, and replied: "You will never be better unless you get rid of your worry."

He drew in a sharp breath, and said: "I know that. I am afraid I shall never be better."

There was a silence in which we looked at each other steadily, and then he added, with an intense but quiet misery: "Never—never!"

At that he moved his hand across his forehead wearily, rose, and turned toward the door. He swayed as he did so, and would have fallen, but I caught him as he lost consciousness, and laid him on the cabin sofa. I chafed his hands, unloosed his collar, and opened the bosom of his shirt. As the linen dropped away from his throat, a small portrait on ivory was exposed on his breast. I did not look closely at it then, but it struck me that the woman's head in the portrait was familiar, though the artistic work was not recent, and the fashion of the hair was of years before. When his eyes opened, and he felt his neck bare, he hurriedly put up his hand and drew the collar close, and at the same time sent a startled and inquiring look at me. After a few moments I helped him to his feet, and, thanking me more with a look than with words, he turned towards the door again.

"Wait," I said, "until I give you some medicine, and then you shall take my arm to your cabin." With a motion of the hand, signifying the uselessness of remedies, he sat down again. As I handed him the phial, I continued: "I know that it is none of my business, but you are suffering. To help your body, your mind should be helped also. Can't you tell me your trouble? Perhaps I should be able to serve you. I would if I could."

It may be that I spoke with a little feeling and an apparent honesty; for his eyes searched mine in a kind of earnest bewilderment, as if this could not be true—as if, indeed, life had gone so hard with him that he had forgotten the way of kindness. Then he stretched out his hand and said brokenly: "I am grateful, believe me. I cannot tell you just now, but I will soon, perhaps." His hand was upon the curtain of the door, when my steward's voice was heard outside, calling my name. The man himself entered immediately, and said that Mrs. Falchion sent her compliments, and would I come at once to see her companion, Miss Caron, who had injured herself.

The Intermediate Passenger turned towards me a strange look; his lips opened as if about to speak, but he said nothing. At the instant there came to my mind whom the picture on his breast resembled: it was Mrs. Falchion.

I think he saw this new intelligence in my face, and a meaning smile took the place of words, as he slowly left the cabin, mutely refusing assistance.

I went to Mrs. Falchion's cabin, and met her outside the door. She looked displeased. "Justine has hurt herself," she said. "Please attend to her; I am going on deck."

The unfeeling nature of this remark held me to the spot for a moment; then I entered the cabin. Justine Caron, a delicate but warm-faced girl of little more than twenty, was sitting on the cabin sofa,

her head supported against the wall, and her hand wound in a handkerchief soaked in blood. Her dress and the floor were also stained. I undid the handkerchief and found an ugly wound in the palm of the hand. I called the steward, and sent him to my dispensary for some necessaries; then I asked her how it happened. At the moment I saw the cause—a broken bottle lying on the floor. "The ship rolled," she said. "The bottle fell from the shelf upon the marble washstand, and, breaking, from there to the floor. Madame caught at my arm to save herself from falling; but I slipped, and was cut on the bottle—so."

As she ended there was a knock, but the curtain was not drawn, and Mrs. Falchion's voice was heard. "My dress is stained, Justine."

The half-fainting girl weakly replied: "I am very sorry, madame, indeed."

To this Mrs. Falchion rejoined: "When you have been attended to, you may go to bed, Justine. I shall not want you again to-night. But I shall change my dress. It is so unpleasant; I hate blood. I hope you will be well in the morning."

To this Justine replied: "Ah, madame, I am sorry. I could not help it; but I shall be quite well in the morning, I am sure." Then she added quietly to me: "The poor madame! She will not see suffering. She hates pain. Sickness troubles her. Shall I be able to use my hand very soon, monsieur?"

There was a wistful look in her eyes, and guessing why it was there, I said: "Yes, soon, I hope—in a few days, no doubt."

Her face lighted up, and she said: "Madame likes about her people who are happy and well." Then, as if she might have said too much, she hurriedly added: "But she is very kind;" and, stooping down quickly, her face whitening with the effort, she caught up the broken glass and threw it through the port-hole into the sea.

A half-hour later I went on deck, and found Mrs. Falchion comfortably seated in her deck-chair. I brought a stool over, and sat down beside her. To this hour the quickness with which I got upon friendly terms with her astonishes me.

"Justine is better?" she said, and her hand made a slight motion of disgust.

"Yes. She was not dangerously hurt, of course."

"Let us change the subject, please. They are going to have a fancy-dress ball on board, I believe, before we get to Aden. How tiresome! Isn't it a little affectation on the part of the stage-struck committee? Isn't it—inconsequent?"

"That depends," I said vaguely, inviting a question. She idled with a book in her lap.

"On what?"

"On those who go, what costumes are worn, and how much beauty and art appear."

"But the trouble! Does it pay? What return does one get?"

"If all admire, half are envious, some are jealous, and one is devoted— isn't that enough?" I think I was a fool that night.

"You seem to understand women," she said, with a puzzling and not quite satisfactory smile. "Yes, all that is something."

Though I was looking at the sea rather than at her, I saw again that inquiring look in her eyes—such a measuring look as a recruiting sergeant might give a victim of the Queen's shilling.

After a moment's pause she continued, I thought, abstractedly: "As what should you go?"

I answered lightly and without premeditation, "As Caius Cassius. Why should you not appear as Portia?"

She lifted her eyebrows at me.

"As Portia?"

"As Portia, the wife of Brutus," I blundered on, at the same time receiving her permission, by a nod, to light my cigar.

"The pious, love-sick wife of Brutus!" This in a disdainful tone, and the white teeth clicked softly together.

"Yes, a good disguise," I said banteringly, though I fancy somewhat tentatively also, and certainly with a touch of rudeness. I was thinking at that moment of the Intermediate Passenger, and I was curious.

"And you think of going in the disguise of a gentleman? Caius Cassius was that, wasn't he?" she retorted in an ironical tone.

"I suppose he was, though he was punished once for rudeness," I replied apologetically.

"Quite so," was the decisive reply.

I felt that she was perfectly cool, while I was a little confused, and ashamed too, that I had attempted to be playfully satirical. And so, wondering what I should say next, I remarked in desperation: "Do you like the sea?"

"I am never ill at sea," was her reply. "But I do not really like it; it is treacherous. The land would satisfy me if—" She paused.

"Yes, Mrs. Falchion—'if'?"

"If I did not wish to travel," she vaguely added, looking blandly at me.

"You have travelled much?" I ventured.

"A great deal;" and again I saw that scrutiny in her eyes. It occurred to me at the moment that she might think I possessed some previous knowledge of her.

My mind became occupied again with the Intermediate Passenger and the portrait that he wore at his neck. I almost laughed to think of the melodramatic turn which my first conversation with this woman might chance to take. I felt that I was dealing with one who was able to meet cleverly any advance of mine, but I determined to lead the talk into as deep waters as possible.

"I suppose, too, you are a good practical sailor—that is, you understand seamanship, if you have travelled much?" I do not know why I said that, for it sounded foolish to me afterwards.

"Pretty well," she replied. "I can manage a sail; I know the argot, I could tell the shrouds from the bulwarks, and I've rowed a boat in a choppy sea."

"It is not an accomplishment usual to your sex."

"It was ordinary enough where I spent the early part of my life," was the idle reply; and she settled herself more comfortably in her chair.

"Yes? May I ask where that was?" and as I said this, it occurred to me that she was, perhaps, leading me on, instead of my leading her; to betray me as to anything I knew about her.

"In the South Seas," she replied. "My father was a British consul in the Islands."

"You have not come from the Islands now, I suppose?"

"No," she said a little more softly; "it is years since I was in Samoa.
. . . My father is buried there."

"You must have found it a romantic life in those half-barbaric places?"

She shifted in her chair. "Romantic!" Her tone conveyed a very slight uneasiness and vagueness. "I am afraid you must ask some one else about that sort of thing. I did not see much romance, but I saw plenty that was half-barbaric." Here she laughed slightly.

Just then I saw the lights of a vessel far off. "See—a vessel!" I said; and I watched the lights in silence, but thinking. I saw that she too was watching idly.

At length, as if continuing the conversation, I said: "Yes, I suppose life must be somewhat adventurous and dangerous among savage people like the Samoans, Tongans, and Fijians?"

"Indeed, then," she replied decisively, "you are not to suppose anything of the kind. The danger is not alone for the white people."

At this I appeared, as I really was, interested, and begged her to explain what she meant. She thought a moment, and then briefly, but clearly, sketched the life of those islands, showing how, in

spite of missionary labour selfish and unselfish, the native became the victim of civilisation, the prey of the white trader and beachcomber, who were protected by men-of-war with convincing Nordenfeldt and Hotchkiss guns; how the stalwart force of barbaric existence declined, and with it the crude sense of justice, the practice of communism at its simplest and purest, the valour of nationality. These phrases are my own—the substance, not the fashion, of her speech.

"You do not, then," I said, "believe wholly in the unselfishness of missionaries, the fair dealing of traders, the perfect impartiality of justice, as shown through steel-clad cruisers?"

"I have seen too much to be quite fair in judgment, I fear, even to men-of-war's men;" and she paused, listening to a song which came from the after-part of the ship. The air was very still, and a few of the words of the droll, plaintive ditty came to us.

Quartermaster Stone, as he passed us, hummed it, and some voices of the first-class passengers near joined in the refrain:

"Sing, hey, for a rover on the sea,
And the old world!"

Some days later I got all of the song from one of the intermediate passengers, and the last verse of it I give here:

"I'm a-sailing, I'm a-sailing on the sea,
To a harbour where the wind is still;
Oh, my dearie, do you wait for me?
Oh, my dearie, do you love me still?
Sing, hey, for a rover on the sea,
And the old world!"

I noticed that Mrs. Falchion's brow contracted as the song proceeded, making a deep vertical line between the eyes, and that the fingers of the hand nearest me closed on the chair-arm firmly. The hand attracted me. It was long, the fingers were shapely, but not markedly tapering, and suggested firmness. I remarked afterward, when I chanced to shake hands with her, that her fingers enclosed one's hand; it was not a mere touch or pressure, but an unemotional and possessive clasp. I felt sure that she had heard the song before, else it had not produced even this so slight effect on her nerves. I said: "It is a quaint song. I suppose you are familiar with it and all of its kind?"

"I fancy I have heard it somewhere," she answered in a cold voice.

I am aware that my next question was not justified by our very short acquaintance; but this acquaintance had been singular from its beginning, and it did not seem at that moment as it looks on paper; besides, I had the Intermediate Passenger in my mind. "Perhaps your husband is a naval man?" I asked.

A faint flush passed over her face, and then, looking at me with a neutral expression and some reserve of manner, she replied: "My husband was not a naval man."

She said "was not." That implied his death.

There was no trouble in her manner; I could detect no sign of excitement. I turned to look at the lights of the approaching vessel, and there, leaning against the railing that divided the two decks, was the Intermediate Passenger. He was looking at us intently. A moment after he disappeared. Beyond doubt there was some intimate association between these two.

My thoughts were, however, distracted by our vessel signalling the other. Hungerford was passing just then, and I said: "Have you any idea what vessel it is, Hungerford?"

"Yes, man-of-war 'Porcupine', bound for Aden, I think."

Mrs. Falchion at this laughed strangely, as she leaned forward looking, and then, rising quickly, said: "I prefer to walk."

"May I accompany you?" I asked.

She inclined her head, and we joined the promenaders. The band was playing, and, for a ship-band, playing very well, the ballet music of Delibes' 'Sylvia'. The musicians had caught that unaccentuated and sensuous swing of the melody which the soft, tropical atmosphere rendered still more languorous. With Mrs. Falchion's hand upon my arm, I felt a sense of capitulation to the music and to her, uncanny in its suddenness. At this distance of time it seems to me absurd. I had once experienced something of

the same feeling with the hand of a young medical student, who, skilled in thought-reading, discovered the number of a bank-note that was in my mind.

This woman had an attractiveness compelling and delightful, at least in its earlier application to me. Both professionally and socially I have been brought into contact with women of beauty and grace, but never one who, like Mrs. Falchion, being beautiful, seemed so unconscious of the fact, so indifferent to those about her, so untouched by another's emotion, so lacking in sensitiveness of heart; and who still drew people to her. I am speaking now of the earlier portion of our acquaintance; of her as she was up to this period in her life.

I was not alone in this opinion of her, for, as time went on, every presentable man and woman on the boat was introduced to her; and if some women criticised and some disliked her, all acknowledged her talent and her imperial attraction. Among the men her name was never spoken but with reserve and respect, and her afternoon teas were like a little court. She had no compromising tenderness of manner for man or woman; she ruled, yet was unapproachable through any avenues of sentiment. She had a quiet aplomb, which would be called 'sang-froid' in a man.

"Did you ever see a Spanish-Mexican woman dance?" she asked in one of the pauses of the music.

"Never: never any good dancing, save what one gets at a London theatre."

"That is graceful," she said, "but not dancing. You have heard of music stirring the blood; of savage races—and others—working themselves up to ecstatic fury? Maybe you have seen the Dervishes, or the Fijians, or the Australian aboriginals? No? Well, I have, and I have seen—which is so much more—those Spanish-Mexican women dance. Did you ever see anything so thrilling, so splendid, that you felt you must possess it?"—She asked me that with her hand upon my arm!—"Well, that is it. I have felt that way towards a horse which has won a great race, and to a woman who has carried me with her through the fantastic drama of her dance, until she stood at the climax, head thrown back, face glowing—a statue. It is grand to be eloquent like that, not in words, but in person."

In this was the key to her own nature. Body and mind she was free from ordinary morbidity, unless her dislike of all suffering was morbid. With her this was a dislike of any shock to the senses. She was selfish at all points.

These conclusions were pursued at the expense of speech on my part. At first she did not appear to regard my silence. She seemed to have thoughts of her own; but she shook them off with a little firm motion of the shoulders, and, with the assumption of a demureness of manner and an airy petulance, said: "Well, amuse me."

"Amuse you?" was my reply. "Delighted to do so if I can. How?"

"Talk to me," was the quick response.

"Would that accomplish the purpose?" This in a tone of mock protest.

"Please don't be foolish, Dr. Marmion. I dislike having to explain. Tell me things."

"About what?"

"Oh, about yourself—about people you have met, and all that; for I suppose you have seen a good deal and lived a good deal."

"About hospital cases?" I said a little maliciously.

"No, please, no! I abhor everything that is sick and poor and miserable."

"Well," said I, at idle venture, "if not a hospital, what about a gaol?"

I felt the hand on my arm twitch slightly, and then her reply came.

"I said I hated everything that was wretched and wicked. You are either dense, or purposely irritating."

"Well, then, a college?"

"A college? Yes, that sounds better. But I do not wish descriptions of being 'gated,' or 'sent down,' or 'ploughed,' and that kind of commonplace. I should prefer, unless your vanity leads you irresistibly in that direction, something with mature life and amusement; or, at least, life and incident, and good sport—if you do not dwell on the horrors of killing."

On the instant there came to me the remembrance of Professor Valiant's wife. I think it was not what she wanted; but I had a purpose, and I began:

"Every one at St. Luke's admired and respected Professor Valiant's wife, she was so frank and cordial and prettily downright. In our rooms we all called her a good chap, and a dashed good chap when her husband happened to be rustier than usual. He was our professor in science. It was the general belief that he chose science for his life-work because it gave unusual opportunities for torture. He was believed to be a devoted vivisectionist; he certainly had methods of cruelty, masterly in their ingenuity. He could make a whole class raw with punishment in a few words; and many a scorching bit of Latin verse was written about his hooked nose and fishy eye.

"But his highest talents in this direction were reserved for his wife. His distorted idea of his own importance made him view her as a chattel, an inferior being; the more so, I believe, because she brought him little money when he married her. She was too much the woman to pretend to kneel to him, and because she would not be his slave, she had a hard time of it. He began by insisting that she should learn science, that she might assist him in his experiments. She knew that she had no taste for it, that it was no part of her wifely duty, and she did what suited her better—followed the hounds. It was a picture to see her riding across country. She could take a fence with a sound hunter like a bird. And so it happened that, after a time, they went their own ways pretty well; he ignoring her, neglecting her, deprecating her by manner, if not by speech, and making her life more than uncomfortable.

"She was always kind to me. I was the youngest chap in the college, and was known as 'Marmy' by every one; and because I was fonder of science than most other men in the different years, Valiant was more gracious to me than the rest, though I did not like him. One day, when I called, I heard her say to him, not knowing that I was near: 'Whatever you feel, or however you act towards me in private, I will have respect when others are present.'

"It was the custom for the professors to invite each student to luncheon or dinner once during term-time. Being somewhat of a favourite of both Professor and Mrs. Valiant however, I lunched with them often. I need hardly say that I should not have exceeded the regulation once had it not been for Mrs. Valiant. The last time I went is as clear in my memory as if it were yesterday. Valiant was more satirical and cold-blooded than usual. I noticed a kind of shining hardness in his wife's eyes, which gave me a strange feeling; yet she was talkative and even gay, I thought, while I more than once clinched my fist under the table, so much did I want to pummel him; for I was a lover of hers, in a deferential, boyish way.

"At last, knowing that she liked the hunt, I asked her if she was going to the meet on the following Saturday, saying that I intended to follow, having been offered a horse. With a steely ring to her voice, and a further brightening of the eyes, she said: 'You are a stout little sportsman, Marmy. Yes, I am going on Major Karney's big horse, Carbine.'

"Valiant looked up, half sneering, half doubtful, I thought, and rejoined: 'Carbine is a valuable horse, and the fences are stiff in the Garston country.'

"She smiled gravely, then, with her eyes fixed on her husband, said: 'Carbine is a perfect gentleman. He will do what I ask him. I have ridden him.'

"The devil you have!' he replied.

"I am sure,' said I, as I hoped, bravely, and not a little enthusiastically, 'that Carbine would take any fence you asked him.'

"Or not, as the case might be. Thank you, Marmy, for the compliment,' she said.

"A Triton among minnows,' remarked Valiant, not entirely under his breath; 'horses obey, and students admire, and there is no end to her greatness.'

"There is an end to everything, Edward,' she remarked a shade sadly and quietly.

"He turned to me and said: 'Science is a great study, Marmion, but it is sardonic too; for you shall find that when you reduce even a Triton to its original elements—'

"Oh, please let me finish,' she interrupted softly. 'I know the lecture so well. It reads this way: "The place of generation must break to give place to the generated; but the influence spreads out beyond the fragments, and is greater thus than in the mass—neither matter nor mind can be destroyed. The earth was molten before it became cold rock and quiet world." There, you see, Marmy, that I am a fellow-student of yours.'

"Valiant's eyes were ugly to watch; for she had quoted from a lecture of his, delivered to us that week. After an instant he said, with slow maliciousness: 'Oh, ye gods, render me worthy of this Portia, and teach her to do as Brutus's Portia did, ad eternum!'

"She shuddered a little, then said very graciously, and as if he had meant nothing but kindness: 'Beggart that I am, I am even poor in thanks.' I will leave you now to your cigarettes; and because I must go out soon, and shall not, I fear, see you again this afternoon, good-bye, Marmy, till Saturday—till Saturday.' And she left us.

"I was white and trembling with anger. He smiled coolly, and was careful to choose me one of his best cigars, saying as he handed it: 'Conversation is a science, Marmion. Study it; there is solid satisfaction in it; it is the only art that brings instant pleasure. Like the stage, it gets its immediate applause.'

"Well, Mrs. Valiant did ride Carbine on that Saturday. Such a scene it was! I see it now—the mottled plump of hounds upon the scent, the bright sun showing up the scarlet coats of the whips gloriously, the long stride of the hunters, ears back and quarters down! She rode Carbine, and the fences WERE stiff—so stiff that I couldn't have taken half of them. Afterward I was not sorry that I couldn't; for she rode for a fall that day on Carbine, her own horse, she had bought him of Major Karney a few days before,—and I heard her last words as she lay beside him, smiling through the dreadful whiteness of her lips. 'Goodbye, Marmy,' she whispered. 'Carbine and I go together. It is better so, in the full cry and a big field. Tell the men at Luke's that I hope they will pass at the coming exams. . . . I am going up—for my final—Marmy.— I wonder—if I'll—pass.' And then the words froze on her lips.

"It was persecution that did it—diabolical persecution and selfishness. That was the worst day the college ever knew. At the funeral, when the provost read, 'For that it hath pleased Thee to deliver this our sister out of the miseries of this sinful world,' Big Wallington, the wildest chap among the grads, led off with a gulp in his throat, and we all followed. And that gold-spectacled sneak stood there, with a lying white handkerchief at his eyes.

"I laid myself out to make the college too hot for him. In a week I had every man in the place with me, and things came to such a pass that all of us must be sent down, or Valiant resign. He resigned. He found another professorship; but the thing followed him, and he was obliged to leave the country."

When I finished the story, Mrs. Falchion was silent for a time, then, with a slight air of surprise, and in a quite critical way, she said: "I should think you would act very well, if you used less emotion. Mrs. Valiant had a kind of courage, but she was foolish to die. She should have stayed and fought him—fought him every way, until she was his master. She could have done it; she was clever, I should think. Still, if she had to die, it was better to go with a good horse that way. I think I should prefer to go swiftly, suddenly, but without the horror of blood and bruises, and that sort of thing. . . . I should like to meet Professor Valiant. He was hard, but he was able too. . . . But haven't we had enough of horror? I asked you to amuse me, and you have merely interested me instead. Oh!—"

This exclamation, I thought, was caused by the voice of the quartermaster humming:

"I'm a-sailing, I'm a-sailing on the sea,
To a harbour where the wind is still"—

Almost immediately she said: "I think I will go below." Then, after a slight pause: "This is a liberal acquaintance for one day, Dr. Marmion; and, you know, we were not introduced."

"No, Mrs. Falchion, we were not introduced; but I am in some regards your host, and I fear we should all be very silent if we waited for regular introductions here. The acquaintance gives me pleasure, but it is not nearly so liberal as I hope it may become."

She did not answer, but smiled at me over her shoulder as she passed down the staircase, and the next instant I could have bitten my tongue for playing the cavalier as I had done; for showing, as I think I did, that she had an influence over me—an influence peculiar to herself, and difficult to account for when not in her presence.

I sat down, lit a cigar, and went over in my mind all that had been said between us; all that had occurred in my cabin after dinner; every minute since we left Colombo was laid bare to its minutest detail. Lascars slipped by me in the half-darkness, the voices of two lovers near alternated with their expressive silences, and from the music saloon there came the pretty strains of a minuet, played very deftly. Under the influence of this music my thoughts became less exact; they drifted. My eyes shifted to the lights of the 'Porcupine' in the distance, and from them again to the figures passing and repassing me on the deck. The "All's well" of the look-out seemed to come from an endless distance; the swish of water against the dividing hull of the 'Fulvia' sounded like a call to silence from another world;

the phosphorescence swimming through the jarred waters added to the sensation of unreality and dreams. These dreams grew, till they were broken by a hand placed on my shoulder, and I saw that one of the passengers, Clovelly, an English novelist, had dropped out from the promenade to talk with me. He saw my mood, however, and said quietly: "Give me a light for my cigar, will you? Then, astride this stool, I'll help you to make inventory of the rest of them. A pretty study; for, at our best, 'What fools we mortals be!'"

"Motley is your only wear," was my reply; and for a full half-hour, which, even for a man, is considerable, we spoke no word, but only nodded when some one of the promenaders noticed us. There was a bookmaker fresh from the Melbourne races; an American, Colonel Ryder, whose eloquence had carried him round the world; a stalwart squatter from Queensland; a pretty widow, who had left her husband under the sods of Tasmania; a brace of girls going to join their lovers and be married in England; a few officers fleeing from India with their livers and their lives; a family of four lanky lasses travelling "home" to school; a row of affable ladies, who alternated between envy and gaiety and delight in, and criticism of, their husbands; a couple of missionaries, preparing to give us lectures on the infamous gods of the heathen,—gods which, poor harmless little creatures! might be bought at a few annas a pint at Aden or Colombo,—and on the Exodus and the Pharaohs—pleasures reserved for the Red Sea; a commercial traveller, who arranged theatricals, and cast himself for all the principal parts; a humorous and naive person who industriously hinted at the opulence of his estates in Ireland; two stately English ladies of title; a cheerful array of colonial knights and judges off to Europe for a holiday; and many others, who made little worlds unto themselves, called cliques by blunt people.

"To my mind, the most interesting persons on the ship," said Clovelly at last, "are the bookmaker, Miss Treherne, and the lady with whom you have just been talking—an exceptional type."

"An unusual woman, I fancy," was my reply. "But which is Miss Treherne? I am afraid I am not quite sure."

He described her and her father, with whom I had talked—a London Q.C., travelling for his health, a notable man with a taste for science, who spent his idle hours in reading astronomy and the plays of Euripides.

"Why not include the father in the list of the most interesting persons?" I questioned.

"Because I have met many men like him, but no one quite like his daughter, or Mrs.—what is her name?"

"Mrs. Falchion."

"Or Mrs. Falchion or the bookmaker."

"What is there so uncommon about Miss Treherne? She had not struck me as being remarkable."

"No? Well, of course, she is not striking after the fashion of Mrs. Falchion. But watch her, study her, and you will find her to be the perfection of a type—the finest expression of a decorous convention, a perfect product of social conservatism; unaffected, cheerful, sensitive, composed, very talented, altogether companionable."

"Excuse me," I said, laughing, though I was impressed; "that sounds as if you had been writing about her, and applying to her the novelist's system of analysis, which makes an imperfect individual a perfect type. Now, frankly, are you speaking of Miss Treherne, or of some one of whom she is the outline, as it were?"

Clovelly turned and looked at me steadily. "When you consider a patient," he said, "do you arrange a diagnosis of a type or of a person? —And, by the way, 'type' is a priggish word."

"I consider the type in connection with the person."

"Exactly. The person is the thing. That clears up the matter of business and art. But now, as to Miss Treherne: I want to say that, having been admitted to her acquaintance and that of her father, I have thought of them only as friends, and not as 'characters' or 'copy.'"

"I beg your pardon, Clovelly," said I. "I might have known."

"Now, to prove how magnanimous I am, I shall introduce you to Miss Treherne, if you will let me. You've met her father, I suppose?" he added, and tossed his cigar overboard.

"Yes, I have talked with him. He is a courteous and able man, I should think."

We rose. Presently he continued: "See, Miss Treherne is sitting there with the Tasmanian widow—what is HER name?"

"Mrs. Callendar," I replied. "Blackburn, the Queenslander, is joining them."

"So much the better," he said. "Come on."

As we passed the music saloon, we paused for an instant to look through the port-hole at a pale-faced girl with big eyes and a wonderful bright red dress, singing "The Angels' Serenade," while an excitable bear-leader turned her music for her. Near her stood a lanky girl who adored actors and tenors, and lived in the hope of meeting some of those gentlemen of the footlights, who plough their way so calmly through the hearts of maidens fresh from school.

We drew back to go on towards Miss Treherne, when Hungerford touched me on the arm, and said: "I want to see you for a little while, Marmion, if Mr. Clovelly will excuse you."

I saw by Hungerford's face that he had something of importance to say, and, linking my arm in his, I went with him to his cabin, which was near those of the intermediate passengers.

CHAPTER III

A TALE OF NO MAN'S SEA

Inside the cabin Hungerford closed the door, gripped me by the arm, and then handed me a cheroot, with the remark: "My pater gave them to me last voyage home. Have kept 'em in tea." And then he added, with no appearance of consecutiveness: "Hang the bally ship, anyhow!"

I shall not attempt to tone down the crudeness of Hungerford's language. It contents me to think that the solidity of his character and his worth will appear even through the crust of free-and-easy idioms, as they will certainly be seen in his acts;—he was sound at heart and true as steel.

"What is the matter, Hungerford?" I asked lighting the cheroot.

"Everything's the matter. Captain, with his nose in the air, and trusting all round to his officers. First officer, no good—never any use since they poured the coal on him. Purser, ought to be on a Chinese junk. Second, third, fourth officers, first-rate chaps, but so-so sailors. Doctor, frivolling with a lovely filly, pedigree not known. Why, confound it! nobody takes this business seriously except the captain, and he sits on a golden throne. He doesn't know that in any real danger this swagger craft would be filled with foolishness. There isn't more than one good boat's crew on board—sailors, lascars, stewards, and all. As for the officers, if the surgeon would leave the lovely ladies to themselves, he'd find cases worth treating, and duties worth doing. He should keep himself fit for shocks. And he can take my word for it—for I've been at sea since I was a kid, worse luck!—that a man with anything to do on a ship ought to travel every day nose out for shipwreck next day, and so on, port to port. Ship-surgeons, as well as all other officers, weren't ordained to follow after cambric skirts and lace handkerchiefs at sea. Believe me or not as you like, but, for a man having work to do, woman, lovely woman, is rocks. Now, I suppose you'll think I'm insolent, for I'm younger than you are, Marmion, but you know what a rough-and-tumble fellow I am, and you'll not mind."

"Well, Hungerford," I said, "to what does this lead?"

"To Number 116 Intermediate, for one thing. It's letting off steam for another. I tell you, Marmion, these big ships are too big. There are those canvas boats. They won't work; you can't get them together. You couldn't launch one in an hour. And as for the use of the others, the lascars would melt like snow in any real danger. There's about one decent boat's crew on the ship, that's all. There! I've unburdened myself; I feel better."

Presently he added, with a shake of the head: "See here: now-a-days we trust too much to machinery and chance, and not enough to skill of hand and brain stuff. I'd like to show you some of the crews I've had in the Pacific and the China Sea—but I'm at it again! I'll now come, Marmion, to the real reason why I brought you here. . . . Number 116 Intermediate is under the weather; I found him fainting in the passage. I helped him into his cabin. He said he'd been to you to get medicine, and you'd given him some. Now, the strange part of the business is, I know him. He didn't remember me, however—perhaps because he didn't get a good look at me. Coincidence is a strange thing. I can point to a dozen in my

short life, every one as remarkable, if not as startling, as this. Here, I'll spin you a yarn:

"It happened four years ago. I had no moustache then, was fat like a whale, and first mate on the 'Dancing Kate', a pearler in the Indian Ocean, between Java and Australia. That was sailing, mind you—real seamanship, no bally nonsense; a fight every weather, interesting all round. If it wasn't a deadly calm, it was a typhoon; if it wasn't either, it was want of food and water. I've seen us with pearls on board worth a thousand quid, and not a drop of water nor three square meals in the caboose. But that was life for men and not Miss Nancys. If they weren't saints, they were sailors, afraid of nothing but God Almighty—and they do respect Him, even when they curse the winds and the sea. Well, one day we were lying in the open sea, about two hundred and fifty miles from Port Darwin. There wasn't a breath of air. The sea was like glass; the sun was drawing turpentine out of every inch of the 'Dancing Kate'. The world was one wild blister. There wasn't a comfortable spot in the craft, and all round us was that staring, oily sea. It was too hot to smoke, and I used to make a Sede boy do my smoking for me. I got the benefit of the smell without any work. I was lying under the droop of a dingey, making the Sede boy call on all his gods for wind, with interludes of smoke, when he chucked his deities and tobacco, and, pointing, shouted, 'Man! man!'

"I snatched a spy-glass. Sure enough, there was a boat on the water. It was moving ever so slowly. It seemed to stop, and we saw something lifted and waved, and then all was still again. I got a boat's crew together, and away we went in that deadly smother. An hour's row and we got within hail of the derelict—as one of the crew said, 'feelin' as if the immortal life was jerked out of us.' The dingey lay there on the glassy surface, not a sign of life about her. Yet I had, as I said, seen something waved. The water didn't even lap its sides. It was ghostly, I can tell you. Our oars licked the water; they didn't attack it. Now, I'm going to tell you something, Marmion, that'll make you laugh. I don't think I've got any poetry in me, but just then I thought of some verses I learned when I was a little cove at Wellington—a devilishly weird thing. It came to me at that moment like a word in my ear. It made me feel awkward for a second. All sailors are superstitious, you know. I'm superstitious about this ship. Never mind; I'll tell you the verses, to show you what a queer thing memory is. The thing was called 'No Man's Sea':

"The days are dead in the No Man's Sea,
And God has left it alone;
The angels cover their heads and flee,
And the wild four winds have flown.

"There's never a ripple upon the tide,
There's never a word or sound;
But over the waste the white wraiths glide,
To look for the souls of the drowned.

"The No Man's Sea is a gaol of souls,
And its gate is a burning sun,
And deep beneath it a great bell tolls
For a death that never is done.

"Alas! for any that comes anear,
That lies on its moveless breast;
The grumbling water shall be his bier,
And never a place of rest."

"There are four of the verses. Well, I made a motion to stop the rowing, and was mum for a minute. The men got nervous. They looked at the boat in front of us, and then turned round, as though to see if the 'Dancing Kate' was still in sight. I spoke, and they got more courage. I stood up in the boat, but could see nothing in the dingey. I gave a sign to go on, and soon we were alongside. In the bottom of the dingey lay a man, apparently dead, wearing the clothes of a convict. One of the crew gave a grunt of disgust, the others said nothing. I don't take to men often, and to convicts precious seldom; but there was a look in this man's face which the prison clothes couldn't demoralise—a damned pathetic look, which seemed to say, 'Not guilty.'

"In a minute I was beside him, and found he wasn't dead. Brandy brought him round a little; but he was a bit gone in the head, and muttered all the way back to the ship. I had unbuttoned his shirt, and I saw on his breast a little ivory portrait of a woman. I didn't let the crew see it; for the fellow, even in his delirium, appeared to know I had exposed the thing, and drew the linen close in his fingers, and for a long time held it at his throat."

"What was the woman's face like, Hungerford?" I asked.

He parried, remarking only that she had the face of a lady, and was handsome.

I pressed him. "But did it resemble any one you had ever seen?"

With a slight droop of his eyelids, he said: "Don't ask foolish questions, Marmion. Well, the castaway had a hard pull for life. He wouldn't have lived at all, if a breeze hadn't come up and let us get away to the coast. It was the beginning of the monsoon, and we went bowling down towards Port Darwin, a crowd of Malay proas in our wake. However, the poor beggar thought he was going to die, and one night he told me his story. He was an escaped convict from Freemantle, Western Australia. He had, with others, been taken up to the northern coast to do some Government work, and had escaped in the dingey. His crime was stealing funds belonging to a Squatting and Mining Company. There was this extenuating circumstance: he could have replaced the money, which, as he said, he'd only intended to use for a few weeks. But a personal enemy threw suspicion on him, accounts were examined, and though he showed he'd only used the money while more of his own was on the way to him, the Company insisted on prosecuting him. For two reasons: because it was itself in bad odour, and hoped by this trial to divert public attention from its own dirty position; and because he had against him not only his personal enemy, but those who wanted to hit the Company through him. He'd filched to be able to meet the large expenses of his wife's establishment. Into this he didn't enter minutely, and he didn't blame her for having so big a menage; he only said he was sorry that he hadn't been able to support it without having to come, even for a day, to the stupidity of stealing. After two years he escaped. He asked me to write a letter to his wife, which he'd dictate. Marmion, you or I couldn't have dictated that letter if we'd taken a year to do it. There was no religion in it, no poppy-cock, but straightforward talk, full of sorrow for what he'd done, and for the disgrace he'd brought on her. I remember the last few sentences as if I'd seen them yesterday. 'I am dying on the open sea, disgraced, but free,' he said. 'I am not innocent in act, but I was not guilty of intentional wrong. I did what I did that you should have all you wished, all you ought to have. I ask but this—and I shall soon ask for nothing—that you will have a kind thought, now and then, for the man who always loved you, and loves you yet. I have never blamed you that you did not come near me in my trouble; but I wish you were here for a moment before I go away for ever. You must forgive me now, for you will be free. If I were a better man I would say, God bless you. In my last conscious moments I will think of you, and speak your name. And now good-bye—an everlasting good-bye. I was your loving husband, and am your lover until death.' And it was signed, 'Boyd Madras.'

"However, he didn't die. Between the captain and myself, we kept life in him, and at last landed him at Port Darwin; all of us, officers and crew, swearing to let no one know he was a convict. And I'll say this for the crew of the 'Dancing Kate' that, so far as I know, they kept their word. That letter, addressed in care of a firm of Melbourne bankers, I gave back to him before we landed. We made him up a purse of fifty pounds,— for the crew got to like him,—and left him at Port Darwin, sailing away again in a few days to another pearl-field farther east. What happened to him at Port Darwin and elsewhere, I don't know; but one day I found him on a fashionable steamer in the Indian Ocean, looking almost as near to Kingdom Come as when he starved in the dingey on No Man's Sea. As I said before, I think he didn't recognise me; and he's lying now in 116 Intermediate, with a look on him that I've seen in the face of a man condemned to death by the devils of cholera or equatorial fever. And that's the story, Marmion, which I brought you to hear—told, as you notice, in fine classical style."

"And why do you tell ME this, Hungerford—a secret you've kept all these years? Knowledge of that man's crime wasn't necessary before giving him belladonna or a hot bath."

Hungerford kept back the whole truth for reasons of his own. He said: "Chiefly because I want you to take a decent interest in the chap. He looks as if he might go off on the long voyage any tick o' the clock. You are doctor, parson, and everything else of the kind on board. I like the poor devil, but anyhow I'm not in a position to be going around with ginger-tea in a spoon, or Ecclesiastes under my arm,—very good things. Your profession has more or less to do with the mind as well as the body, and you may take my word for it that Boyd Madras's mind is as sick as his torso. By the way, he calls himself 'Charles Boyd,' so I suppose we needn't recall to him his former experiences by adding the 'Madras.'"

Hungerford squeezed my arm again violently, and added: "Look here, Marmion, we understand each other in this, don't we? To do what we can for the fellow, and be mum."

Some of this looks rough and blunt, but as it was spoken there was that in it which softened it to my ear. I knew he had told all he thought I ought to know, and that he wished me to question him no more, nor to refer to Mrs. Falchion, whose relationship to Boyd Madras—or Charles Boyd—both of us suspected.

"It was funny about those verses coming to my mind, wasn't it, Marmion?" he continued. And he began to repeat one of them, keeping time to the wave-like metre with his cheroot, winding up with a

quick, circular movement, and putting it again between his lips:

"There's never a ripple upon the tide,
There's never a breath or sound;
But over the waste the white wraiths glide,
To look for the souls of the drowned."

Then he jumped off the berth where he had been sitting, put on his jacket, said it was time to take his turn on the bridge, and prepared to go out, having apparently dismissed Number 116 Intermediate from his mind.

I went to Charles Boyd's cabin, and knocked gently. There was no response. I entered. He lay sleeping soundly—the sleep that comes after nervous exhaustion. I had a good chance to study him as he lay there. The face was sensitive and well fashioned, but not strong; the hands were delicate, yet firmly made. One hand was clinched upon that portion of his breast where the portrait hung.

CHAPTER IV

THE TRAIL OF THE ISHMAELITE

I went on deck again, and found Clovelly in the smoking-room. The bookmaker was engaged in telling tales of the turf, alternated with comic songs by Blackburn—an occupation which lasted throughout the voyage, and was associated with electric appeals to the steward to fill the flowing bowl. Clovelly came with me, and we joined Miss Treherne and her father. Mr. Treherne introduced me to his daughter, and Clovelly amiably drew the father into a discussion of communism as found in the South Sea Islands.

I do not think my conversation with Miss Treherne was brilliant. She has since told me that I appeared self-conscious and preoccupied. This being no compliment to her, I was treated accordingly. I could have endorsed Clovelly's estimate of her so far as her reserve and sedateness were concerned. It seemed impossible to talk naturally. The events of the day were interrupting the ordinary run of thought, and I felt at a miserable disadvantage. I saw, however, that the girl was gifted and clear of mind, and possessed of great physical charm, but of that fine sort which must be seen in suitable surroundings to be properly appreciated. Here on board ship a sweet gravity and a proud decorum—not altogether unnecessary—prevented her from being seen at once to the best advantage. Even at this moment I respected her the more for it, and was not surprised, nor exactly displeased, that she adroitly drew her father and Clovelly into the conversation. With Clovelly she seemed to find immediate ground for naive and pleasant talk; on his part, deferential, original, and attentive; on hers, easy, allusive, and warmed with piquant humour. I admired her; saw how cleverly Clovelly was making the most of her; guessed at the solicitude, studious care, and affection of her bringing-up; watched the fond pleasure of the father as he listened; and was angry with myself that Mrs. Falchion's voice rang in my ears at the same moment as hers. But it did ring there, and the real value of that smart tournament of ideas was partially lost to me.

The next morning I went to Boyd Madras's cabin. He welcomed me gratefully, and said that he was much better; as he seemed; but he carried a hectic flush, such as comes to a consumptive person. I said little to him beyond what was necessary for the discussion of his case. I cautioned him about any unusual exertion, and was about to leave, when an impulse came to me, and I returned and said: "You will not let me help you in any other way?"

"Yes," he answered; "I shall be very glad of your help, but not just yet. And, Doctor, believe me, I think medicines can do very little. Though I am thankful to you for visiting me, you need not take the trouble, unless I am worse, and then I will send a steward to you, or go to you myself."

What lay behind this request, unless it was sensitiveness, I could not tell; but I determined to take my own course, and to visit him when I thought fit.

Still, I saw him but once or twice on the after-deck in the succeeding days. He evidently wished to keep out of sight as much as possible. I am ashamed to say there was a kind of satisfaction in this to me; for, when a man's wife—and I believed she was Boyd Madras's wife—hangs on your arm, and he himself is denied that privilege, and fares poorly beside her sumptuousness, and lives as a stranger to her, you can scarcely regard his presence with pleasure. And from the sheer force of circumstances, as

it seemed to me then, Mrs. Falchion's hand was often on my arm; and her voice was always in my ear at meal-times and when I visited Justine Caron to attend to her wound, or joined in the chattering recreations of the music saloon. It was impossible not to feel her influence; and if I did not yield entirely to it, I was more possessed by it than I was aware. I was inquisitive to know beyond doubt that she was the wife of this man. I think it was in my mind at the time that, perhaps, by being with her much, I should be able to do him a service. But there came a time when I was sufficiently undeceived. It was all a game of misery in which some one stood to lose all round. Who was it: she, or I, or the refugee of misfortune, Number 116 Intermediate? She seemed safe enough. He or I would suffer in the crash of penalties.

It was a strange situation. I, the acquaintance of a day, was welcome within the circle of this woman's favour—though it was an unemotional favour on her side; he, the husband, as I believed, though only half the length of the ship away, was as distant from her as the north star. When I sat with her on deck at night, I seemed to feel Boyd Madras's face looking at me from the half-darkness of the after-deck; and Mrs. Falchion, whose keen eyes missed little, remarked once on my gaze in that direction. Thereafter I was more careful, but the idea haunted me. Yet, I was not the only person who sat with her. Other men paid her attentive court. The difference was, however, that with me she assumed ever so delicate, yet palpable an air of proprietorship, none the less alluring because there was no heart in it. So far as the other passengers were concerned, there was nothing jarring to propriety in our companionship. They did not know of Number 116 Intermediate. She had been announced as a widow; and she had told Mrs. Callendar that her father's brother, who, years before, had gone to California, had died within the past two years and left her his property; and, because all Californians are supposed to be millionaires, her wealth was counted fabulous. She was going now to England, and from there to California in the following year. People said that Dr. Marmion knew on which side his bread was buttered. They may have said more unpleasant things, but I did not hear them, or of them.

All the time I was conscious of a kind of dishonour, and perhaps it was that which prompted me (I had fallen away from my intention of visiting him freely) to send my steward to see how Boyd Madras came on, rather than go myself. I was, however, conscious that the position could not—should not—be maintained long. The practical outcome of this knowledge was not tardy. A new influence came into my life which was to affect it permanently: but not without a struggle.

A series of concerts and lectures had been arranged for the voyage, and the fancy-dress ball was to close the first part of the journey—that is, at Aden. One night a concert was on in the music saloon. I had just come from seeing a couple of passengers who had been suffering from the heat, and was debating whether to find Mrs. Falchion, who, I knew, was on the other side of the deck, go in to the concert, or join Colonel Ryder and Clovelly, who had asked me to come to the smoking-room when I could. I am afraid I was balancing heavily in favour of Mrs. Falchion, when I heard a voice that was new to me, singing a song I had known years before, when life was ardent, and love first came—halcyon days in country lanes, in lilac thickets, of pleasant Hertfordshire, where our footsteps met a small bombardment of bursting seed-pods of the furze, along the green common that sloped to the village. I thought of all this, and of HER everlasting quiet.

With a different voice the words of the song would have sent me out of hearing; now I stood rooted to the spot, as the notes floated out past me to the nervelessness of the Indian Ocean, every one of them a commandment from behind the curtain of a sanctuary.

The voice was a warm, full contralto of exquisite culture. It suggested depths of rich sound behind, from which the singer, if she chose, might draw, until the room and the deck and the sea ached with sweetness. I scarcely dared to look in to see who it was, lest I should find it a dream. I stood with my head turned away towards the dusky ocean. When, at last, with the closing notes of the song, I went to the port-hole and looked in, I saw that the singer was Miss Treherne. There was an abstracted look in her eyes as she raised them, and she seemed unconscious of the applause following the last chords of the accompaniment. She stood up, folding the music as she did so, and unconsciously raised her eyes toward the port-hole where I was. Her glance caught mine, and instantly a change passed over her face. The effect of the song upon her was broken; she flushed slightly, and, as I thought, with faint annoyance. I know of nothing so little complimentary to a singer as the audience that patronisingly listens outside a room or window,—not bound by any sense of duty as an audience,—between whom and the artists an unnatural barrier is raised. But I have reason to think now that Belle Treherne was not wholly moved by annoyance—that she had seen something unusual, maybe oppressive, in my look. She turned to her father. He adjusted his glasses as if, in his pride, to see her better. Then he fondly took her arm, and they left the room.

Then I saw Mrs. Falchion's face at the port-hole opposite. Her eyes were on me. An instant before, I had intended following Miss Treherne and her father; now some spirit of defiance, some unaccountable revolution, took possession of me, so that I flashed back to her a warm recognition. I could not have

believed it possible, if it had been told of me, that, one minute affected by beautiful and sacred remembrances, the next I should be yielding to the unimpassioned tyranny of a woman who could never be anything but a stumbling-block and an evil influence. I had yet to learn that in times of mental and moral struggle the mixed fighting forces in us resolve themselves into two cohesive powers, and strive for mastery; that no past thought or act goes for nothing at such a time, but creeps out from the darkness where we thought it had gone for ever, and does battle with its kind against the common foe. There moved before my sight three women: one, sweet and unsubstantial, wistful and mute and very young, not of the earth earthy; one, lissom, grave, with gracious body and warm abstracted eyes, all delicacy, strength, reserve; the other and last, daring, cold, beautiful, with irresistible charm, silent and compelling. And these are the three women who have influenced my life, who fought in me then for mastery; one from out the unchangeable past, the others in the tangible and delible present. Most of us have to pass through such ordeals before character and conviction receive their final bias; before human nature has its wild trouble, and then settles into "cold rock and quiet world;" which any lesser after-shocks may modify, but cannot radically change.

I tried to think. I felt that to be wholly a man I should turn from those eyes drawing me on. I recalled the words of Clovelly, who had said to me that afternoon, half laughingly: "Dr. Marmion, I wonder how many of us wish ourselves transported permanently to that time when we didn't know champagne from 'alter feiner madeira' or dry hock from sweet sauterne; when a pretty face made us feel ready to abjure all the sinful lusts of the flesh and become inheritors of the kingdom of heaven? Egad! I should like to feel it once again. But how can we, when we have been intoxicated with many things; when we are drunk with success and experience; have hung on the fringe of unrighteousness; and know the world backward, and ourselves mercilessly?"

Was I, like the drunkard, coming surely to the time when I could no longer say yes to my wisdom, or no to my weakness? I knew that, an hour before, in filling a phial with medicine, I found I was doing it mechanically, and had to begin over again, making an effort to keep my mind to my task. I think it is an axiom that no man can properly perform the business of life who indulges in emotional preoccupation.

These thoughts, which take so long to write, passed then through my mind swiftly; but her eyes were on me with a peculiar and confident insistence—and I yielded. On my way to her I met Clovelly and Colonel Ryder. Hungerford was walking between them. Colonel Ryder said: "I've been saving that story for you, Doctor; better come and get it while it's hot."

This was a promised tale of the taking of Mobile in the American Civil War.

At any other time the invitation would have pleased me mightily; for, apart from the other two, Hungerford's brusque and original conversation was always a pleasure—so were his cheroots; but now I was under an influence selfish in its source. At the same time I felt that Hungerford was storing up some acute criticism of me, and that he might let me hear it any moment. I knew, numbering the order of his duties, that he could have but a very short time to spare for gossip at this juncture, yet I said that I could not join them for half an hour or so. Hungerford had a fashion of looking at me searchingly from under his heavy brows, and I saw that he did so now with impatience, perhaps contempt. I was certain that he longed to thrash me. That was his idea of punishment and penalty. He linked his arm in those of the other two men, and they moved on, Colonel Ryder saying that he would keep the story till I came and would wait in the smoking-room for me.

The concert was still on when I sat down beside Mrs. Falchion. "You seemed to enjoy Miss Treherne's singing?" she said cordially enough as she folded her hands in her lap.

"Yes, I thought it beautiful. Didn't you?"

"Pretty, most pretty; and admirable in technique and tone; but she has too much feeling to be really artistic. She felt the thing, instead of pretending to feel it—which makes all the difference. She belongs to a race of delightful women, who never do any harm, whom everybody calls good, and who are very severe on those who do not pretend to be good. Still, all of that pleasant race will read their husband's letters and smuggle. They have no civic virtues. Yet they would be shocked to bathe on the beach without a machine, as American women do,—and they look for a new fall of Jerusalem when one of their sex smokes a cigarette after dinner. Now, I do not smoke cigarettes after dinner, so I can speak freely. But, at the same time, I do not smuggle, and I do bathe on the beach without a machine—when I am in a land where there are no sharks and no taboo. If morally consumptive people were given a few years in the South Seas, where they could not get away from nature, there would be more strength and less scandal in society."

I laughed. "There is a frank note for Mr. Clovelly, who thinks he knows the world and my sex thoroughly. He says as much in his books.—Have you read his 'A Sweet Apocalypse'? He said more than

as much to me. But he knows a mere nothing about women—their amusing inconsistencies; their infidelity in little things and fidelity in big things; their self-torturings; their inability to comprehend themselves; their periods of religious insanity; their occasional revolts against the restraints of a woman's position, known only to themselves in their dark hours; ah, really, Dr. Marmion, he is ignorant, I assure you. He has only got two or three kinds of women in his mind, and the representatives of these fooled him, as far as he went with them, to their hearts' content. Believe me, there is no one quite so foolish as the professional student of character. He sees things with a glamour; he is impressionable; he immediately begins to make a woman what he wishes her to be for his book, not what she is; and women laugh at him when they read his books, or pity him if they know him personally. I venture to say that I could make Mr. Clovelly use me in a novel—not 'A Sweet Apocalypse'—as a placid lover of fancy bazaars and Dorcas societies, instead of a very practical person, who has seen life without the romantic eye, and knows as well the working of a buccaneering craft—through consular papers and magisterial trials, of course—as of a colonial Government House. But it is not worth while trying to make him falsify my character. Besides, you are here to amuse me."

This speech, as she made it, was pleasantly audacious and clever. I laughed, and made a gesture of mock dissent, and she added: "Now I have finished my lecture. Please tie my shoe-lace there, and then, as I said, amuse me. Oh, you can, if you choose! You are clever when you like to be. Only, this time, do not let it be a professor's wife who foolishly destroys herself, and cuts short what might have been a brilliant career."

On the instant I determined to probe deeper into her life, and try her nerve, by telling a story with enough likeness to her own (if she was the wife of Boyd Madras) to affect her acutely; though I was not sure I could succeed. A woman who triumphs over sea-sickness, whom steam from the boilers never affects, nor the propeller-screw disturbs, has little to fear from the words of a man who is neither adroit, eloquent, nor dramatic. However, I determined to try what I could do. I said: "I fancy you would like something in the line of adventure; but my career has not run in that direction, so I shall resort to less exciting fields, and, I fear, also, a not very cheerful subject."

"Oh, never mind!" said she. "What you wish, so long as it is not conventional and hackneyed. But I know you will not be prosy, so go on, please."

"Well," I began, "once, in the hospital, I attended a man—Anson was his name—who, when he thought he was going to die, confided to me his life's secret. I liked the man; he was good-looking, amiable, but hopelessly melancholy. He was dying as much from trouble as disease. No counsel or encouragement had any effect upon him; he did, as I have seen so many do—he resigned himself to the out-going tide. Well, for the secret. He had been a felon. His crime had been committed through ministering to his wife's vanity."

Here I paused. I felt Mrs. Falchion's eyes searching me. I raised mine steadily to hers with an impersonal glance, and saw that she had not changed colour in the least. But her eyes were busy.

I proceeded: "When he was disgraced she did not come near him. When he went to her, after he was released" (here I thought it best to depart from any close resemblance to Mrs. Falchion's own story), "and was admitted to her, she treated him as an absolute stranger—as one who had intruded, and might be violent. She said that she and her maid were alone in the house, and hinted that he had come to disturb them. She bade him go, or she must herself go. He called her by his own name, and begged her, by the memory of their dead child, to speak kindly to him. She said he was quite mistaken in her name, that she was Mrs. Glave, not Mrs. Anson, and again insisted that he should go. He left her, and at last, broken-hearted, found his way, in illness and poverty to the hospital, where, toward the last, he was cared for by a noble girl, a companion of his boyhood and his better days, who urged his wife to visit him. She left him alone, said unpleasant things to the girl, did not come to see her husband when he was dead, and provided nothing for his burial. You see that, like you, she hated suffering and misery—and criminals. The girl and her mother paid the expenses of the funeral, and, with myself, were the only mourners. I am doubtful if the wife knows even where he lies. I admit that the story sounds melodramatic; but truth is more drama than comedy, I fancy. Now, what do you think of it all, Mrs. Falchion?"

I had felt her shrink a little at the earlier part of my story, as if she feared that her own tale was to be brutally bared before her; but that soon passed, and she languidly tapped the chair-arm as the narrative continued. When it was finished, she leaned over slightly, and with these same fingers tapped my arm. I thrilled involuntarily.

"He died, did he?" she said. "That was the most graceful thing he could do. So far as my knowledge of the world is concerned, men of his class do NOT die. They live, and they never rise above their degradation. They had not brains or courage enough to keep them out of gaol, and they have not pluck or brains enough to succeed—afterwards. Your friend Anson was quite gentlemanly in his action at the

last. He had some sense of the fitness of things. He could not find a place in the world without making other people uncomfortable, and causing trouble. If he had lived, he would always have added to the blight on his wife's career, and have been an arrow—not a thorn—in her side. Very likely he would have created a scandal for the good young girl who nursed him. He made the false step, and compelled society to reject him. It did not want to do so; it never does. It is long-suffering; it tries not to see and acknowledge things until the culprit himself forces it to take action. Then it says: 'Now you have openly and inconsiderately broken our bond of mutual forbearance. You make me send you away. Go, then, behind stone walls, and please do not come to me again. If you do, you will only be a troublesome ghost. You will cause awkwardness and distress.' So, Mr. Anson—I must be polite to him—did the most reasonable and proper thing. He disappeared from the play before it actually became tragedy. There was no tragedy in his death—death is a magnificent ally; it untangles knots. The tragedy was in his living—in the perpetual ruin of his wife's life, renewed every morning. He disappeared. Then the play became drama, with only a little shadow of tragedy behind it. Now, frankly, am I not right?"

"Mrs. Falchion," I said, "your argument is clever, but it is only incidentally true. You draw life, society and men no more correctly than the author of 'A Sweet Apocalypse' would draw you. The social law you sketch when reduced to its bare elements, is remorseless. It does not provide for repentance, for restitution, for recovering a lost paradise. It makes an act final, a sin irrevocable."

"Well, since we are beginning to talk like a couple of books by a pair of priggish philosophers, I might as well say that I think sin is final so far as the domestic and social machinery of the world is concerned. What his religious belief requires of a man is one thing, what his fellow-men require of him is another. The world says, You shall have latitude enough to swing in freely, but you must keep within the code. As soon as you break the law openly, and set the machinery of public penalty in motion, there is an end of you, so far as this world is concerned. You may live on, but you have been broken on the wheel, and broken you always will be. It is not a question of right or wrong, of kindness or cruelty, but of general expediency and inevitableness. To all effect, Mr. Anson was dead before he breathed his last. He died when he passed within the walls of a gaol—condemned for theft."

There was singular scorn in her last few words, and, dissent as I did from her merciless theories, I was astonished at her adroitness and downrightness—enchanted by the glow of her face. To this hour, knowing all her life as I do, I can only regard her as a splendid achievement of nature, convincing even when at the most awkward tangents with the general sense and the strictest interpretation of life; convincing even in those other and later incidents, which showed her to be acting not so much by impulse as by the law of her nature. Her emotions were apparently rationalised at birth—to be derationalised and broken up by a power greater than herself before her life had worked itself out. I had counted her clever; I had not reckoned with her powers of reasoning. Influenced as I was by emotion when in her presence, I resorted to a personal application of my opinions—the last and most unfair resort of a disputant. I said I would rather be Anson dead than Mrs. Anson living; I would rather be the active than the passive sinner; the victim, than a part of that great and cruel machine of penalty.

"The passive sinner!" she replied. "Why, what wrong did she do?"

The highest moral conceptions worked dully in her. Yet she seemed then, as she always appeared to be, free from any action that should set the machine of penalty going against herself. She was inexorable, but she had never, knowingly, so much as slashed the hem of the moral code.

"It was to give his wife pleasure that Anson made the false step," I urged.

"Do you think she would have had the pleasure at the price? The man was vain and selfish to run any risk, to do anything that might endanger her safety—that is, her happiness and comfort."

"But suppose he knew that she loved ease and pleasure?—that he feared her anger or disdain if he did not minister to her luxuries?"

"Then he ought not to have married that kind of a woman." The hardness in her voice was matched at that moment by the coldness of her face.

"That is begging the question," I replied. "What would such a selfish woman do in such a case, if her pleasure could not be gratified?"

"You must ask that kind of woman," was her ironical answer.

I rashly felt that her castle of strength was crumbling. I ventured farther.

"I have done so."

She turned slightly toward me, yet not nervously, as I had expected.

"What did she say?"

"She declined to answer directly."

There was a pause, in which I felt her eyes searching my face. I fear I must have learned dissimulation well; for, after a minute, I looked at her, and saw, from the absence of any curious anxiety, that I had betrayed nothing. She looked me straight in the eyes and said: "Dr. Marmion, a man must not expect to be forgiven, who has brought shame on a woman."

"Not even when he has repented and atoned?"

"Atoned! How mad you are! How can there be atonement? You cannot wipe things out—on earth. We are of the earth. Records remain. If a man plays the fool, the coward, and the criminal, he must expect to wear the fool's cap, the white feather, and the leg-chain until his life's end. And now, please, let us change the subject. We have been bookish long enough." She rose with a gesture of impatience.

I did not rise. "Pardon me, Mrs. Falchion," I urged, "but this interests me so. I have thought much of Anson lately. Please, let us talk a little longer. Do sit down."

She sat down again with an air of concession rather than of pleasure.

"I am interested," I said, "in looking at this question from a woman's standpoint. You see, I am apt to side with the miserable fellow who made a false step—foolish, if you like—all for love of a selfish and beautiful woman."

"She was beautiful?"

"Yes, as you are." She did not blush at that rank compliment, any more than a lioness would, if you praised the astonishing sleekness and beauty of its skin.

"And she had been a true wife to him before that?"

"Yes, in all that concerned the code."

"Well?—Well, was not that enough? She did what she could, as long as she could." She leaned far back in the chair, her eyes half shut.

"Don't you think—as a woman, not as a theorist—that Mrs. Anson might at least have come to him when he was dying?"

"It would only have been uncomfortable for her. She had no part in his life; she could not feel with him. She could do nothing."

"But suppose she had loved him? By that memory, then, of the time when they took each other for better or for worse, until death should part them?"

"Death did part them when the code banished him; when he passed from a free world into a cage. Besides, we are talking about people marrying, not about their loving."

"I will admit," I said, with a little raw irony, "that I was not exact in definition."

Here I got a glimpse into her nature which rendered after events not so marvellous to me as they might seem to others. She thought a moment quite indolently, and then continued: "You make one moralise like George Eliot. Marriage is a condition, but love must be an action. The one is a contract, the other is complete possession, a principle—that is, if it exists at all. I do not know."

She turned the rings round mechanically on her finger; and among them was a wedding-ring! Her voice had become low and abstracted, and now she seemed to have forgotten my presence, and was looking out upon the humming darkness round us, through which now and again there rang a boatswain's whistle, or the loud laugh of Blackburn, telling of a joyous hour in the smoking-room.

I am now about to record an act of madness, of folly, on my part. I suppose most men have such moments of temptation, but I suppose, also, that they act more sensibly and honourably than I did then. Her hand had dropped gently on the chair-arm, near to my own, and though our fingers did not touch, I felt mine thrilled and impelled toward hers. I do not seek to palliate my action. Though the man I believed to be her husband was below, I yielded myself to an imagined passion for her. In that moment I was a captive. I caught her hand and kissed it hotly.

"But you might know what love is," I said. "You might learn—learn of me. You—"

Abruptly and with surprise she withdrew her hand, and, without any visible emotion save a quicker pulsation of her breast, which might have been indignation, spoke. "But even if I might learn, Dr. Marmion, be sure that neither your college nor Heaven gave you the knowledge to instruct me. . . . There: pardon me, if I speak harshly; but this is most inconsiderate of you, most impulsive—and compromising. You are capable of singular contrasts. Please let us be friends, friends simply. You are too interesting for a lover, really you are."

Her words were a cold shock to my emotion—my superficial emotion; though, indeed, for that moment she seemed adorable to me. Without any apparent relevancy, but certainly because my thoughts in self-reproach were hovering about cabin 116 Intermediate, I said, with a biting shame, "I do not wonder now!"

"You do not wonder at what?" she questioned; and she laid her hand kindly on my arm.

I put the hand away a little childishly, and replied, "At men going to the devil." But this was not what I thought.

"That does not sound complimentary to somebody. May I ask you what you mean?" she said calmly. "I mean that Anson loved his wife, and she did not love him; yet she held him like a slave, torturing him at the same time."

"Does it not strike you that this is irrelevant? You are not my husband—not my slave. But, to be less personal, Mr. Anson's wife was not responsible for his loving her. Love, as I take it, is a voluntary thing. It pleased him to love her—he would not have done it if it did not please him; probably his love was an inconvenient thing domestically—if he had no tact."

"Of that," I said, "neither you nor I can know with any certainty. But, to be scriptural, she reaped where she had not sowed, and gathered where she had not strawed. If she did not make the man love her,—I believe she did, as I believe you would, perhaps unconsciously, do,—she used his love, and was therefore better able to make all other men admire her. She was richer in personal power for that experience; but she was not grateful for it nor for his devotion."

"You mean, in fact, that I—for you make the personal application—shall be better able henceforth to win men's love, because—ah, surely, Dr. Marmion, you do not dignify this impulse, this foolishness of yours, by the name of love!" She smiled a little satirically at the fingers I had kissed.

I was humiliated, and annoyed with her and with myself, though, down in my mind, I knew that she was right. "I mean," said I, "that I can understand how men have committed suicide because of just such things. My wonder is that Anson, poor devil! did not do it." I knew I was talking foolishly.

"He hadn't the courage, my dear sir. He was gentlemanly enough to die, but not to be heroic to that extent. For it does need a strong dash of heroism to take one's own life. As I conceive it, suicide would have been the best thing for him when he sinned against the code. The world would have pitied him then, would have said, He spared us the trial of punishing him. But to pay the vulgar penalty of prison—ah!"

She shuddered and then almost coldly continued: "Suicide is an act of importance; it shows that a man recognises, at least, the worthlessness of his life. He does one dramatic and powerful thing; he has an instant of great courage, and all is over. If it had been a duel in which, of intention, he would fire wide, and his assailant would fire to kill, so much the better; so much the more would the world pity. But either is superior, as a final situation, than death with a broken heart—I suppose that is possible?—and disgrace, in a hospital."

"You seem to think only of the present, only of the code and the world; and as if there were no heroism in a man living down his shame, righting himself heroically at all points possible, bearing his penalty, and showing the courage of daily wearing the sackcloth of remorse and restitution."

"Oh," she persisted, "you make me angry. I know what you wish to express; I know that you consider it a sin to take one's life, even in 'the high Roman fashion.' But, frankly, I do not, and I fear—or rather, I fancy—that I never shall. After all, your belief is a pitiless one; for, as I have tried to say, the man has not himself alone to consider, but those to whom his living is a perpetual shame and menace and cruelty insupportable—insupportable! Now, please, let us change the subject finally; and"—here she softly laughed—"forgive me if I have treated your fancied infatuation lightly or indifferently. I want you for a friend—at least, for a friendly acquaintance. I do not want you for a lover."

We both rose. I was not quite content with her nor with myself yet. I felt sure that while she did not wish me for a lover, she was not averse to my playing the devoted cavalier, who should give all, while she should give nothing. I knew that my punishment had already begun. We paced the deck in silence;

and once, as we walked far aft, I saw, leaning upon the railing of the intermediate deck, and looking towards us—Boyd Madras; and the words of that letter which he wrote on the No Man's Sea came to me.

At length she said: "You have made no reply to my last remark. Are we to be friends, and not lovers? Or shall you cherish enmity against me? Or, worse still,"—and here she laughed, I thought, a little ironically, —"avoid me, and be as icy as you have been—fervid?"

"Mrs. Falchion," I said, "your enemy I do not wish to be—I could not be if I wished; but, for the rest, you must please let me see what I may think of myself to-morrow. There is much virtue in to-morrow," I added. "It enables one to get perspective."

"I understand," she said; and then was silent. We walked the deck slowly for several minutes. Then we were accosted by two ladies of a committee that had the fancy-dress ball in hand. They wished to consult Mrs. Falchion in certain matters of costume and decoration, for which, it had been discovered, she had a peculiar faculty. She turned to me half inquiringly, and I bade her good-night, inwardly determined (how easy it is after having failed to gratify ourselves!) that the touch of her fingers should never again make my heart beat faster.

I joined Colonel Ryder and Clovelly in the smoking-room. Hungerford, as I guessed gladly, was gone. I was too much the coward to meet his eye just then. Colonel Ryder was estimating the amount he would wager—if he were in the habit of betting—that the 'Fulvia' could not turn round in her tracks in twenty minutes, while he parenthetically endorsed Hungerford's remarks to me—though he was ignorant of them—that lascars should not be permitted on English passenger ships. He was supported by Sir Hayes Craven, a shipowner, who further said that not one out of ten British sailors could swim, while not five out of ten could row a boat properly. Ryder's anger was great, because Clovelly remarked with mock seriousness that the lascars were picturesque, and asked the American if he had watched them listlessly eating rice and curry as they squatted between decks; whether he had observed the Serang, with his silver whistle, who ruled them, and despised us "poor white trash;" and if he did not think it was a good thing to have fatalists like them as sailors—they would be cool in time of danger.

Colonel Ryder's indignation was curbed, however, by the bookmaker, who, having no views, but seeing an opportunity for fun, brought up reinforcements of chaff and slang, easily construable into profanity, and impregnated with terse humour. Many of the ladies had spoken of the bookmaker as one of the best-mannered men on board. So he was to all appearance. None dressed with better taste, nor carried himself with such an air. There was even a deferential tone in his strong language, a hesitating quaintness, which made it irresistible. He was at the service of any person on board needing championship. His talents were varied. He could suggest harmonies in colour to the ladies at one moment, and at the next, in the seclusion of the bar counter, arrange deadly harmonies in liquor. He was an authority on acting; he knew how to edit a newspaper; he picked out the really nice points in the sermons delivered by the missionaries in the saloon; he had some marvellous theories about navigation; and his trick with a salad was superb. He now convulsed the idlers in the smoking-room with laughter, and soon deftly drew off the discussion to the speed of the vessel, arranging a sweep-stake immediately, upon the possibilities of the run. He instantly proposed to sell the numbers by auction. He was the auctioneer. With his eye-glass at his eye, and Bohemian pleasantry falling from his lips, he ran the prices up. He was selling Clovelly's number, and had advanced it beyond the novelist's own bidding, when suddenly the screw stopped, the engines ceased working, and the 'Fulvia' slowed down.

The numbers remained unsold. Word came to us that an accident had happened to the machinery, and that we should be hove-to for a day, or longer, to accomplish necessary repairs. How serious the accident to the machinery was no one knew.

CHAPTER V

ACCUSING FACES

While we were hove-to, the 'Porcupine' passed us. In all probability it would now get to Aden ahead of us; and herein lay a development of the history of Mrs. Falchion. I was standing beside Belle Treherne as the ship came within hail of us and signalled to see what was the matter. Mrs. Falchion was not far from us. She was looking intently at the vessel through marine-glasses, and she did not put them down

until it had passed. Then she turned away with an abstracted light in her eyes and a wintry smile; and the look and the smile continued when she sat down in her deck-chair and leaned her cheek meditatively on the marine-glass. But I saw now that something was added to the expression of her face—a suggestion of brooding or wonder. Belle Treherne, noticing the direction of my glances, said: "Have you known Mrs. Falchion long?"

"No, not long," I replied. "Only since she came on board."

"She is very clever, I believe."

I felt my face flushing, though, reasonably, there was no occasion for it, and I said: "Yes, she is one of the ablest women I have ever met."

"She is beautiful, too—very beautiful." This very frankly.

"Have you talked with her?" asked I.

"Yes, a little this morning, for the first time. She did not speak much, however." Here Miss Treherne paused, and then added meditatively: "Do you know, she impressed me as having singular frankness and singular reserve as well? I think I admired it. There is no feeling in her speech, and yet it has great candour. I never before met any one like her. She does not wear her heart upon her sleeve, I imagine."

A moment of irony came over me; that desire to say what one really does not believe (a feminine trait), and I replied: "Are both those articles necessary to any one? A sleeve?—well, one must be clothed. But a heart?—a cumbrous thing, as I take it."

Belle Treherne turned, and looked me steadily in the eyes for an instant, as if she had suddenly awakened from abstraction, and slowly said, while she drew back slightly: "Dr. Marmion, I am only a girl, I know, and inexperienced, but I hoped most people of education and knowledge of life were free from that kind of cynicism to be read of in books." Then something in her thoughts seemed to chill her words and manner, and her father coming up a moment after, she took his arm, and walked away with a not very cordial bow to me.

The fact is, with a woman's quick intuition, she had read in my tone something suggestive of my recent experience with Mrs. Falchion. Her fine womanliness awoke; the purity of her thoughts, rose in opposition to my flippancy and to me; and I knew that I had raised a prejudice not easy to destroy.

This was on a Friday afternoon.

On the Saturday evening following, the fancy-dress ball was to occur. The accident to the machinery and our delay were almost forgotten in the preparations therefor. I had little to do; there was only one sick man on board, and my hand could not cure his sickness. How he fared, my uncomfortable mind, now bitterly alive to a sense of duty, almost hesitated to inquire. Yet a change had come. A reaction had set in for me. Would it be permanent? I dared scarcely answer that question, with Mrs. Falchion at my right hand at table, with her voice at my ear. I was not quite myself yet; I was struggling, as it were, with the effects of a fantastic dream.

Still, I had determined upon my course. I had made resolutions. I had ended the chapter of dalliance. I had wished to go to 116 Intermediate and let its occupant demand what satisfaction he would. I wanted to say to Hungerford that I was an ass; but that was even harder still. He was so thorough and uncompromising in nature, so strong in moral fibre, that I felt his sarcasm would be too outspoken for me just at present. In this, however, I did not give him credit for a fine sense of consideration, as after events showed. Although there had been no spoken understanding between us that Mrs. Falchion was the wife of Boyd Madras, the mind of one was the other's also. I understood exactly why he told me Boyd Madras's story: it was a warning. He was not the man to harp on things. He gave the hint, and there the matter ended, so far as he was concerned, until a time might come when he should think it his duty to refer to the subject again. Some time before, he had shown me the portrait of the girl who had promised to be his wife. She, of course, could trust HIM anywhere, everywhere.

Mrs. Falchion had seen the change in me, and, I am sure, guessed the new direction of my thoughts, and knew that I wished to take refuge in a new companionship—a thing, indeed, not easily to be achieved, as I felt now; for no girl of delicate and proud temper would complacently regard a hasty transference of attention from another to herself. Besides, it would be neither courteous nor reasonable to break with Mrs. Falchion abruptly. The error was mine, not hers. She had not my knowledge of the immediate circumstances, which made my position morally untenable. She showed unembarrassed ignorance of the change. At the same time I caught a tone of voice and a manner which showed she was not actually oblivious, but was touched in that nerve called vanity; and from this much feminine hatred springs.

I made up my mind to begin a course of scientific reading, and was seated in my cabin, vainly trying to digest a treatise on the pathology of the nervous system, when Hungerford appeared at the door. With a nod, he entered, threw himself down on the cabin sofa, and asked for a match. After a pause, he said: "Marmion, Boyd Madras, alias Charles Boyd, has recognised me."

I rose to get a cigar, thus turning my face from him, and said: "Well?"

"Well, there isn't anything very startling. I suppose he wishes I had left him in the dingey on No Man's Sea. He's a fool."

"Indeed, why?"

"Marmion, are your brains softening? Why does he shadow a woman who wouldn't lift her finger to save him from battle, murder, or sudden death?"

"From the code," I said, in half soliloquy.

"From the what?"

"Oh, never mind, Hungerford. I suppose he is shadowing—Mrs. Falchion?"

He eyed me closely.

"I mean the woman that chucked his name; that turned her back on him when he was in trouble; that hopes he is dead, if she doesn't believe that he is actually; that would, no doubt, treat him as a burglar if he went to her, got down on his knees, and said: 'Mercy, my girl, I've come back to you a penitent prodigal. Henceforth I shall be as straight as the sun, so help me Heaven and your love and forgiveness!'"

Hungerford paused, as if expecting me to reply; but, leaning forward on my knees and smoking hard, I remained silent. This seemed to anger him, for he said a little roughly: "Why doesn't he come out and give you blazes on the promenade deck, and corner her down with a mighty cheek, and levy on her for a thousand pounds? Both you and she would think more of him. Women don't dislike being bullied, if it is done in the right way—haven't I seen it the world over, from lubra to dowager? I tell you, man—sinning or not—was meant to be woman's master and lover, and just as much one as the other."

At this point Hungerford's manner underwent a slight change, and he continued: "Marmion, I wouldn't have come near you, only I noticed you have altered your course, and are likely to go on a fresh tack. It isn't my habit to worry a man. I gave you a signal, and you didn't respond at first. Well, we have come within hail again; and now, don't you think that you might help to straighten this tangle, and try to arrange a reconciliation between those two?"

"The scheme is worth trying. Nobody need know but you and me. It wouldn't be much of a sacrifice to her to give him a taste of the thing she swore to do—how does it run?—'to have and to hold from this day forward'?—I can't recall it; but it's whether the wind blows fair or foul, or the keel scrapes the land or gives to the rock, till the sea gulps one of 'em down for ever. That's the sense of the thing, Marmion, and the contract holds between the two, straight on into the eternal belly. Whatever happens, a husband is a husband, and a wife a wife. It seems to me that, in the sight of Heaven, it's he that's running fair in the teeth of the wind, every timber straining, and she that's riding with it, well coaled, flags flying, in an open channel, and passing the derelict without so much as, 'Ahoy there!'"

Now, at this distance of time, I look back, and see Hungerford, "the rowdy sailor," as he called himself, lying there, his dark grey eyes turned full on me; and I am convinced that no honester, more sturdy-minded man ever reefed a sail, took his turn upon the bridge, or walked the dry land in the business of life. It did not surprise me, a year after, when I saw in public prints that he was the hero of—but that must be told elsewhere. I was about to answer him then as I knew he would wish, when a steward appeared and said: "Mr. Boyd, 116 Intermediate, wishes you would come to him, sir, if you would be so kind."

Hungerford rose, and, as I made ready to go, urged quietly: "You've got the charts and soundings, Marmion, steam ahead!" and, with a swift but kindly clench of my shoulder, he left me. In that moment there came a cowardly feeling, a sense of shamefacedness, and then, hard upon it, and overwhelming it, a determination to serve Boyd Madras so far as lay in my power, and to be a man, and not a coward or an idler.

When I found him he was prostrate. In his eyes there was no anger, no indignation, nor sullenness—all of which he might reasonably have felt; and instantly I was ashamed of the thought which, as I came to him, flashed through my mind, that he might do some violent thing. Not that I had any fear of

violence; but I had an active dislike of awkward circumstances. I felt his fluttering pulse, and noted the blue line on his warped lips. I gave him some medicine, and then sat down. There was a silence. What could I say? A dozen thoughts came to my mind, but I rejected them. It was difficult to open up the subject. At last he put his hand upon my arm and spoke:

"You told me one night that you would help me if you could. I ought to have accepted your offer at first; it would have been better.—No, please don't speak just yet. I think I know what you would say. I knew that you meant all you urged upon me; that you liked me. I was once worthy of men's liking, perhaps, and I had good comrades; but that is all over. You have not come near me lately, but it wasn't because you felt any neglect, or wished to take back your words; but—because of something else. . . . I understand it all. She has great power. She always had. She is very beautiful. I remember when—but I will not call it back before you, though, God knows, I go over it all every day and every night, until it seems that only the memory of her is real, and that she herself is a ghost. I ought not to have crossed her path again, even unknown to her. But I have done it, and now I cannot go out of that path without kneeling before her once again, as I did long ago. Having seen her, breathed the same air, I must speak or die; perhaps it will be both. That is a power she has: she can bend one to her will, although she often, involuntarily, wills things that are death to others. One MUST care for her, you understand; it is natural, even when it is torture to do so."

He put his hand on his side and moved as if in pain. I reached over and felt his pulse, then took his hand and pressed it, saying: "I will be your friend now, Madras, in so far as I can."

He looked up at me gratefully, and replied: "I know that—I know that. It is more than I deserve."

Then he began to speak of his past. He told me of Hungerford's kindness to him on the 'Dancing Kate', of his luckless days at Port Darwin, of his search for his wife, his writing to her, and her refusal to see him. He did not rail against her. He apologised for her, and reproached himself. "She is most singular," he continued, "and different from most women. She never said she loved me, and she never did, I know. Her father urged her to marry me; he thought I was a good man."

Here he laughed a little bitterly. "But it was a bad day for her. She never loved any one, I think, and she cannot understand what love is, though many have cared for her. She is silent where herself is concerned. I think there was some trouble—not love, I am sure of that—which vexed her, and made her a little severe at times; something connected with her life, or her father's life, in Samoa. One can only guess, but white men take what are called native wives there very often—and who can tell? Her father—but that is her secret! . . . While I was right before the world, she was a good wife to me in her way. When I went wrong, she treated me as if I were dead, and took her old name. But if I could speak to her quietly once more, perhaps she would listen. It would be no good at all to write. Perhaps she would never begin the world with me again, but I should like to hear her say, 'I forgive you. Good-bye.' There would be some comfort in a kind farewell from her. You can see that, Dr. Marmion?"

He paused, waiting for me to speak. "Yes, I can see that," I said; and then I added: "Why did you not speak to her before you both came on board at Colombo?"

"I had no chance. I only saw her in the street, an hour before the ship sailed. I had scarcely time to take my passage."

Pain here checked his utterance, and when he recovered, he turned again to me, and continued: "Tomorrow night there is to be a fancy-dress ball on board. I have been thinking. I could go in a good disguise. I could speak to her, and attract no notice; and if she will not listen to me, why, then, that ends it. I shall know the worst, and to know the worst is good."

"Yes," said I; "and what do you wish me to do?"

"I wish to go in a disguise, of course; to dress in your cabin, if you will let me. I cannot dress here, it would attract attention; and I am not a first-class passenger."

"I fear," I replied, "that it is impossible for me to assist you to the privileges of a first-class passenger. You see, I am an officer of the ship. But still I can help you. You shall leave this cabin to-night. I will arrange so that you may transfer yourself to one in the first-class section. . . . No, not a word; it must be as I wish in this. You are ill; I can do you that kindness at least, and then, by right, you can attend the ball, and, after it, your being among the first-class passengers can make little difference; for you will have met and spoken then, either to peace or otherwise."

I had very grave doubts of any reconciliation; the substance of my notable conversation with Mrs. Falchion was so prominent in my mind. I feared she would only reproduce the case of Anson and his wife. I was also afraid of a possible scene—which showed that I was not yet able to judge of her

resources. After a time, in which we sat silent, I said to Madras: "But suppose she should be frightened?—should—should make a scene?"

He raised himself to a sitting posture. "I feel better," he said. Then, answering my question: "You do not know her quite. She will not stir a muscle. She has nerve. I have seen her in positions of great peril and trial. She is not emotional, though I truly think she will wake one day and find her heart all fire but not for me. Still, I say that all will be quite comfortable, so far as any demonstration on her part is concerned. She will not be melodramatic, I do assure you."

"And the disguise—your dress?" inquired I.

He rose from the berth slowly, and, opening a portmanteau, drew from it a cloth of white and red, fringed with gold. It was of beautiful texture, and made into the form of a toga or mantle. He said: "I was a seller of such stuffs in Colombo, and these I brought with me, because I could not dispose of them without sacrifice when I left hurriedly. I have made them into a mantle. I could go as—a noble Roman, perhaps!" Then a slight, ironical smile crossed his lips, and he stretched out his thin but shapely arms, as if in derision of himself.

"You will go as Menelaus the Greek," said I.

"I as Menelaus the Greek?" The smile became a little grim.

"Yes, as Menelaus; and I will go as Paris." I doubt not that my voice showed a good deal of self-scorn at the moment; but there was a kind of luxury in self-abasement before him. "Your wife, I know, intends to go as Helen of Troy. It is all mumming. Let it stand so, as Menelaus and Helen and Paris before there was any Trojan war, and as if there never could be any—as if Paris went back discomfited, and the other two were reconciled."

His voice was low and broken. "I know you exaggerate matters, and condemn yourself beyond reason," he replied. "I will do as you say. But, Dr. Marmion, it will not be all mumming, as you shall see."

A strange look came upon his face at this. I could not construe it; and, after a few words of explanation regarding his transference to the forward part of the ship, I left him. I found the purser, made the necessary arrangements for him, and then sought my cabin, humbled in many ways. I went troubled to bed. After a long wakefulness, I dozed away into that disturbed vestibule of sleep where the world's happenings mingle with the visions of unconsciousness. I seemed to see a man's heart beating in his bosom in growing agonies, until, with one last immense palpitation, it burst, and life was gone. Then the dream changed, and I saw a man in the sea, drowning, who seemed never to drown entirely, his hands ever beating the air and the mocking water. I thought that I tried many times to throw him a lighted buoy in the half-shadow, but some one held me back, and I knew that a woman's arms were round me.

But at last the drowning man looked up and saw the woman so, and, with a last quiver of the arms, he sank from sight. When he was gone, the woman's arms dropped away from me; but when I turned to speak to her, she, too, had gone.

I awoke.

Two stewards were talking in the passage, and one was saying, "She'll get under way by daybreak, and it will be a race with the 'Porcupine' to Aden. How the engines are kicking below!"

CHAPTER VI

MUMMERS ALL

The next day was beautiful, if not enjoyable. Stirring preparations were being made for the ball. Boyd Madras was transferred to a cabin far forward, but he did not appear at any meal in the saloon, or on deck. In the morning I was busy in the dispensary. While I was there, Justine Caron came to get some medicine that I had before given her. Her hand was now nearly well. Justine had nerves, and it appeared to me that her efforts to please her mistress, and her occasional failures, were wearing her unduly. I said to her: "You have been worried, Miss Caron?"

"Oh, no, Doctor," she quickly replied.

I looked at her a little sceptically, and she said at last: "Well, perhaps a little. You see, madame did not sleep well last night, and I read to her. It was a little difficult, and there was not much choice of books."

"What did you read?" I asked mechanically, as I prepared her medicine.

"Oh, some French novel first—De Maupassant's; but madame said he was impertinent—that he made women fools and men devils. Then I tried some modern English tales, but she said they were silly. I knew not what to do. But there was Shakespeare. I read Antony and Cleopatra, and she said that the play was grand, but the people were foolish except when they died—their deaths were magnificent. Madame is a great critic; she is very clever."

"Yes, yes, I know that; but when did she fall asleep?"

"About four o'clock in the morning. I was glad, because she is very beautiful when she has much sleep."

"And you—does not sleep concern you in this matter of madame?"

"For me," she said, looking away, "it is no matter. I have no beauty. Besides, I am madame's servant,"—she blushed slightly at this,"—and she is generous with money."

"Yes, and you like money so much?"

Her eyes flashed a little defiantly as she looked me in the face. "It is everything to me."

She paused as if to see the effect upon me, or to get an artificial (I knew it was artificial) strength to go on, then she added: "I love money. I work for it; I would bear all for it—all that a woman could bear. I—" But here she paused again, and, though the eyes still flashed, the lips quivered. Hers was not the face of cupidity. It was sensitive, yet firm, as with some purpose deep as her nature was by creation and experience, and always deepening that nature. I suddenly got the conviction that this girl had a sorrow of some kind in her life, and that this unreal affection for money was connected with it. Perhaps she saw my look of interest, for she hurriedly continued: "But, pardon me, I am foolish. I shall be better when the pain is gone. Madame is kind; she will let me sleep this afternoon, perhaps."

I handed her the medicine, and then asked: "How long have you known Mrs. Falchion, Miss Caron?"

"Only one year."

"Where did you join her?"

"In Australia."

"In Australia? You lived there?"

"No, monsieur, I did not live there."

A thought came to my mind—the nearness of New Caledonia to Australia, and New Caledonia was a French colony—a French penal colony! I smiled as I said the word penal to myself. Of course the word could have no connection with a girl like her, but still she might have lived in the colony. So I added quietly: "You perhaps had come from New Caledonia?"

Her look was candid, if sorrowful. "Yes, from New Caledonia."

Was she, thought I, the good wife of some convict—some political prisoner?—the relative of some refugee of misfortune? Whatever she was, I was sure that she was free from any fault. She evidently thought that I might suspect something uncomplimentary of her, for she said: "My brother was an officer at Noumea. He is dead. I am going to France, when I can."

I tried to speak gently to her. I saw that her present position must be a trial. I advised her to take more rest, or she would break down altogether, for she was weak and nervous; I hinted that she might have to give up entirely, if she continued to tax herself heedlessly; and, finally, that I would speak to Mrs. Falchion about her. I was scarcely prepared for her action then. Tears came to her eyes, and she said to me, her hand involuntarily clasping my arm: "Oh no, no! I ask you not to speak to madame. I will sleep—I will rest. Indeed, I will. This service is so much to me. She is most generous. It is because I am so altogether hers, night and day, that she pays me well. And the money is so much. It is my honour—my dead brother's honour. You are kind at heart; you will make me strong with medicine, and I will ask

God to bless you. I could not suffer such poverty again. And then, it is my honour!"

I felt that she would not have given way thus had not her nerves been shaken, had she not lived so much alone, and irregularly, so far as her own rest and comfort were concerned, and at such perpetual cost to her energy. Mrs. Falchion, I knew, was selfish, and would not, or could not, see that she was hard upon the girl, by such exactions as midnight reading and loss of sleep. She demanded not merely physical but mental energy—a complete submission of both; and when this occurred with a sensitive, high-strung girl, she was literally feeding on another's life-blood. If she had been told this, she, no doubt, would have been very much surprised.

I reassured Justine. I told her that I should say nothing directly to Mrs. Falchion, for I saw she was afraid of unpleasantness; but I impressed upon her that she must spare herself, or she would break down, and extorted a promise that she would object to sitting up after midnight to read to Mrs. Falchion.

When this was done, she said: "But, you see, it is not madame's fault that I am troubled."

"I do not wish," I said, "to know any secret,—I am a doctor, not a priest,—but if there is anything you can tell me, in which I might be able to help you, you may command me in so far as is possible." Candidly, I think I was too inquiring in those days.

She smiled wistfully, and replied: "I will think of what you say so kindly, and perhaps, some day soon, I will tell you of such trouble as I have. But, believe me, it is no question of wrong at all, by any one — now. The wrong is over. It is simply that a debt of honour must be satisfied; it concerns my poor dead brother."

"Are you going to relatives in France?" I asked.

"No; I have no relatives, no near friends. I am alone in the world. My mother I cannot remember; she died when I was very young. My father had riches, but they went before he died. Still, France is home, and I must go there." She turned her head away to the long wastes of sea.

Little more passed between us. I advised her to come often on deck, and mingle with the passengers; and told her that, when she pleased, I should be glad to do any service that lay in my power. Her last words were that, after we put into Aden, she would possibly take me at my word.

After she had gone, I found myself wondering at my presentiment that Aden was to be associated with critical points in the history of some of us; and from that moment I began to connect Justine Caron with certain events which, I felt sure, were marshalling to an unhappy conclusion. I wondered, too, what part I should play in the development of the comedy, tragedy, or whatever it was to be. In this connection I thought of Belle Treherne, and of how I should appear in her eyes if that little scene with Mrs. Falchion, now always staring me in the face, were rehearsed before her. I came quickly to my feet, with a half-imprecation at myself; and a verse of a crude sea-song was in my ears:

"You can batten down cargo, live and dead,
But you can't put memory out of sight;
You can paint the full sails overhead,
But you can't make a black deed white. . . ."

Angry, I said to myself: "It wasn't a black deed; it was foolish, it was infatuation, it was not right, but it is common to shipboard; and I lost my head, that was all."

Some time later I was still at work in the dispensary, when I heard Mr. Treherne's voice calling to me from outside. I drew back the curtain. He was leaning on his daughter's arm, while in one hand he carried a stick. "Ah, Doctor, Doctor," cried he, "my old enemy, sciatica, has me in its grip, and why, in this warm climate, I can't understand. I'm afraid I shall have to heave-to, like the 'Fulvia', and lay up for repairs. And, by the way, I'm glad we are on our course again." He entered, and sat down. Belle Treherne bowed to me gravely, and smiled slightly. The smile was not peculiarly hospitable. I knew perfectly well that to convince her of the reality of my growing admiration for her would be no easy task; but I was determined to base my new religion of the affections upon unassailable canons, and I felt that now I could do best by waiting and proving myself.

While I was arranging some medicine for Mr. Treherne, and advising him on care against chills in a hot climate, he suddenly broke in with: "Dr. Marmion, Captain Ascott tells me that we shall get to Aden by Tuesday morning next. Now, I was asked by a friend of mine in London to visit the grave of a son of his—a newspaper correspondent—who was killed in one of the expeditions against the native tribes, and was buried in the general cemetery at Aden. On the way out I was not able to fulfil the commission, because we passed Aden in the night. But there will be plenty of time to do so on Tuesday, I am told.

This, however, is my difficulty: I cannot go unless I am better, and I'm afraid there is no such luck as that in store for me. These attacks last a week, at least. I wish my daughter, however, to go. One of the ladies on board will go with her—Mrs. Callendar, I believe; and I am going to be so bold as to ask you to accompany them, if you will. I know you better than any officer on board; and, besides, I should feel safer and better satisfied if she went under the protection of an officer,—these barbarous places, you know!—though, of course, it may be asking too much of you, or what is impossible."

I assented with pleasure. Belle Treherne was looking at the Latin names on the bottles at the time, and her face showed no expression either of pleasure or displeasure. Mr. Treherne said bluffly: "Dr. Marmion, you are kind—very kind, and, upon my word, I'm much obliged." He then looked at his daughter as if expecting her to speak.

She looked up and said conventionally: "You are very kind, Dr. Marmion, and I am much obliged." Then I thought her eyes twinkled with amusement at her own paraphrase of her father's speech, and she added: "Mrs. Callendar and myself will be much honoured indeed, and feel very important in having an officer to attend us. Of course everybody else will be envious, and, again of course, that will add to our vanity."

At this she would have gone; but her father, who was suffering just enough pain to enjoy anything that would divert his attention from it, fell into conversation upon a subject of mutual interest, in which his daughter joined on occasion, but not with enthusiasm. Yet, when they came to go, she turned and said kindly, almost softly, as her fingers touched mine: "I almost envy you your profession, Dr. Marmion. It opens doors to so much of humanity and life."

"There is no sin," I laughingly said, "in such a covetousness, and, believe me, it can do no harm to me, at least." Then I added gravely: "I should like my profession, in so far as I am concerned, to be worth your envy." She had passed through the door before the last words were said, but I saw that her look was not forbidding.

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Is there unhappiness anywhere? There is not a vexing toss of the sea, not a cloud in the sky. Is not catastrophe dead, and the arrows of tragedy spilled? Peace broadens into deep, perfumed dusk towards Arabia; languor spreads towards the unknown lands of the farthest south. No anxious soul leans out from the casement of life; the time is heavy with delightful ease. There is no sound that troubles; the world goes by and no one heeds; for it is all beyond this musky twilight and this pleasant hour. In this palace on the sea Mirth trails in and out with airy and harmonious footsteps. Even the clang-clang of eight bells has music—not boisterous nor disturbing, but muffled in the velvety air. Then, through this hemisphere of jocund quiet, there sounds the "All's well" of the watch.

But, look! Did you see a star fall just then, and the long avenue of expiring flame behind it?—Do not shudder; it is nothing. No cry of pain came through that brightness. There was only the "All's well" from the watchers.

The thud of the engines falls on a padded atmosphere, and the lascars move like ghosts along the decks. The long, smooth promenade is canopied and curtained, and hung with banners, and gay devices of the gorgeous East are contributing to the federation of pleasure.

And now, through a festooned doorway, there come the people of many lands to inhabit the gay court. Music follows their footsteps: Hamlet and Esther; Caractacus and Iphigenia; Napoleon and Hermione; The Man in the Iron Mask and Sappho; Garibaldi and Boadicea; an Arab sheikh and Joan of Arc; Mahomet and Casablanca; Cleopatra and Hannibal—a resurrected world. But the illusion is short and slight. This world is very sordid—of shreds and patches, after all. It is but a pretty masquerade, in which feminine vanity beats hard against strangely-clothed bosoms; and masculine conceit is shown in the work of the barber's curling-irons and the ship-carpenter's wooden swords and paper helmets. The pride of these folk is not diminished because Hamlet's wig gets awry, or a Roman has trouble with his foolish garters. Few men or women can resist mumming; they fancy themselves as somebody else, dead or living. Yet these seem happy in this nonsense. The indolent days appear to have deadened hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness. They shall strut and fret their hour upon this little stage. Let that sprightly girl forget the sudden death which made her an orphan; the nervous broker his faithless wife; the grey-haired soldier his silly and haunting sins; the bankrupt his creditors.

"On with the dance, let joy be unconfined!" For the captain is on the bridge, the engineer is beneath; we have stout walls, and a ceaseless sentry-go. In the intervals of the dance wine passes, and idle things are said beside the draped and cushioned capstan or in the friendly gloom of a boat, which, in the name of safety, hangs taut between its davits. Let this imitation Cleopatra use the Cleopatra's arts; this mellow Romeo (sometime an Irish landlord) vow to this coy Juliet; this Helen of Troy— Of all who

walked these decks, mantled and wiggled in characters not their own, Mrs. Falchion was the handsomest, most convincing. With a graceful swaying movement she passed along the promenade, and even envy praised her. Her hand lay lightly on the arm of a brown stalwart native of the Indian hills, fierce and savage in attire. Against his wild picturesqueness and brawny strength, her perfectness of animal beauty, curbed and rendered delicate by her inner coldness, showed in fine contrast; and yet both were matched in the fine natural prowess of form.

With a singular affirmation of what had been, after all, but a sadly- humourous proposal, I had attired myself in a Greek costume—quickly made by my steward, who had been a tailor—and was about to leave my cabin, when Hungerford entered, and exclaimed, as he took his pipe from his mouth in surprise: "Marmion, what does this mean? Don't you know your duties better? No officer may appear at these flare-ups in costume other than his uniform. You're the finest example of suburban innocence and original sin I've seen this last quarter of a century, wherein I've kept the world—and you—from tottering to destruction." He reached for one of my cigars.

Without a word, and annoyed at my own stupidity, I slowly divested myself of the clothes of Greece; while Hungerford smoked on, humming to himself occasionally a few bars of *The Buccaneer's Bride*, but evidently occupied with something in his mind. At length he said: "Marmion, I said suburban innocence and original sin, but you've a grip on the law of square and compass too. I'll say that for you, old chap—and I hope you don't think I'm a miserable prig."

Still I replied nothing, but offered him one of my best cigars, taking the other one from him, and held the match while he lighted it—which, between men, is sufficient evidence of good-feeling. He understood, and continued: "Of course you'll keep your eye on Mrs. Falchion and Madras to-night: if he is determined that they shall meet, and you have arranged it. I'd like to know how it goes before you turn in, if you don't mind. And, I say, Marmion, ask Miss Treherne to keep a dance for me—a waltz—towards the close of the evening, will you? Excuse me, but she is the thorough-bred of the ship. And if I have only one hop down the promenade, I want it to be with a girl who'll remind me of some one that is making West Kensington worth inhabiting. Only think, Marmion, of a girl like her—a graduate in arts, whose name and picture have been in all the papers—being willing to make up with me, Dick Hungerford! She is as natural and simple as a girl can be, and doesn't throw Greek roots at you, nor try to convince you of the difference between the songs of the troubadours and the sonnets of Petrarch. She doesn't care a rap whether Dante's Beatrice was a real woman or a principle; whether James the First poisoned his son; or what's the margin between a sine and a cosine. She can take a fence in the hunting-field like a bird—! Oh, all right, just hold still, and I'll unfasten it." And he struggled with a recalcitrant buckle. "Well, you'll not forget about Miss Treherne, will you? She ought to go just as she is. Fancy-dress on her would be gilding the gold; for, though she isn't surpassingly beautiful, she is very fine, very fine indeed. There, now, you're yourself again, and look all the better for it."

By this time I was again in my uniform, and I sat down, and smoked, and looked at Hungerford. His long gossip had been more or less detached, and I had said nothing. I understood that he was trying, in his blunt, honest way, to turn my thoughts definitely from Mrs. Falchion to Belle Treherne; and he never seemed to me such a good fellow as at that moment. I replied at last: "All right, Hungerford; I'll be your deputation, your ambassador, to Miss Treherne. What time shall we see you on deck?"

"About 11.40—just in time to trip a waltz on the edge of eight bells."

"On the edge of Sunday, my boy."

"Yes. Do you know, it is just four years ago tomorrow since I found Boyd Madras on the No Man's Sea?"

"Let us not talk of it," said I.

"All right. I merely stated the fact because it came to me. I'm mum henceforth. And I want to talk about something else. The first officer,—I don't know whether you have noticed him lately, but I tell you this: if we ever get into any trouble with this ship he'll go to pieces. Why, the other night, when the engine got tangled, he was as timid as a woman. That shock he had with the coal, as I said before, has broken his nerve, big man as he is."

"Hungerford," I said, "you do not generally croak, but you are earning the character of the raven for yourself to-night. The thing is growing on you. What IS the use of bringing up unpleasant subjects? You are an old woman." I fear there was the slightest irritation in my voice; but, truth is, the last few days' experiences had left their mark on me, and Hungerford's speech and manner had suddenly grown trying.

He stood for a moment looking at me with direct earnestness from under his strong brows, and then

he stepped forward, and, laying his hand upon my arm, rejoined: "Do not be raw, Marmion. I'm only a blunt, stupid sailor; and, to tell you God's truth, as I have told you before, every sailor is superstitious—every real sailor. He can't help it—I can't. I have a special fit on me now. Why don't I keep it to myself? Because I'm selfish, and it does me good to talk. You and I are in one secret together, and it has made me feel like sharing this thing with a pal, I suppose."

I seized his hand and begged his pardon, and called myself unpleasant names, which he on the instant stopped, and said: "That's all right, Marmy; shake till the knuckles crack! I'm off. Don't forget the dance." He disappeared down the passage.

Then I went on deck, and the scene which I have so imperfectly described passed before me. Mrs. Falchion was surrounded with admirers all the evening, both men and women; and two of the very stately English ladies of title, to whom I before referred, were particularly gracious to her; while she, in turn, bore herself with becoming dignity. I danced with her once, and was down on her programme for another dance. I had also danced with Belle Treherne, who appeared as Miriam, and was chaperoned by one of the ladies of title; and I had also "sat out" one dance with her. Chancing to pass her as the evening wore on, I saw her in conversation with Mrs. Falchion, who had dismissed her cavalier, preferring to talk, she said, for dancing was tiresome work on the Indian Ocean. Belle Treherne, who up to that moment had never quite liked her, yielded to the agreeable charm of her conversation and her frank applausive remarks upon the costumes of the dancers. She had a good word for every one, and she drew her companion out to make the most of herself, as women less often do before women than in the presence of men. I am certain that her interest in Belle Treherne was real, and likewise certain that she cherished no pique against her because I had transferred my allegiance. Indeed, I am sure that she had no deep feeling of injured pride where I was concerned. Such after acidity as she sometimes showed was directed against the foolish part I had played with her and my action in subsequent events; it did not proceed from personal feeling or self-value.

Some time after this meeting I saw Boyd Madras issue from the companion-way dressed as a Greek. He wore a false beard, and carried off well his garments of white and scarlet and gold—a very striking and presentable man. He came slowly forward, looking about him steadily, and, seeing me, moved towards me. But for his manner I should scarcely have recognised him. A dance was beginning; but many eyes were turned curiously, and even admiringly, to him; for he looked singular and impressive and his face was given fulness by a beard and flesh paints. I motioned him aside where there was shadow, and said: "Well, you have determined to see her?"

"Yes," he said; "and I wish you, if you will, to introduce me to her as Mr. Charles Boyd."

"You still think this wise?" I asked.

"It is my earnest wish. I must have an understanding to-night." He spoke very firmly, and showed no excitement. His manner was calm and gentlemanly.

He had a surprising air of decision. Supporting an antique character, he seemed for the moment to have put on also something of antique strength of mind, and to be no longer the timid invalid. "Then, come with me," I answered.

We walked in silence for a few minutes, and then, seeing where Mrs. Falchion was, we advanced to her. The next dance on her programme was mine. In my previous dance with her we had talked as we now did at table—as we did the first hour I met her—impersonally, sometimes (I am bold to say) amusingly. Now I approached her with apologies for being late. The man beside her took his leave. She had only just glanced at me at first, but now she looked at my companion, and the look stayed, curious, bewildered.

"It is fitting," I said, "that Greek meet Greek—that Menelaus should be introduced to Helen. May I say that when Helen is not Helen she is Mrs. Falchion, and when Menelaus is not Menelaus he is—Mr. Charles Boyd."

I am afraid my voice faltered slightly, because there came over me suddenly a nervousness as unexpected as it was inconvenient, and my words, which began lightly, ended huskily. Had Madras miscalculated this woman?

Her eyes were afire, and her face was as pale as marble; all its slight but healthy glow had fled. A very faint gasp came from her lips. I saw that she recognised him, as he bowed and mentioned her name, following my introduction. I knew not what might occur, for I saw danger in her eyes in reply to the beseeching look in his. Would melodrama supervene after all? She merely bowed towards me, as if

to dismiss me, and then she rose, took his arm, and moved away. The interview that follows came to me from Boyd Madras afterwards.

When they had reached the semi-darkness of the forward part of the ship, she drew her hand quickly away, and, turning to him, said: "What is the name by which you are called? One does not always hear distinctly when being introduced."

He did not understand what she was about to do, but he felt the deadly coldness in her voice. "My name is known to you," he replied. He steadied himself.

"No, pardon me, I do not know it, for I do not know you. . . . I never saw you before." She leaned her hand carelessly on the bulwarks.

He was shocked, but he drew himself together. Their eyes were intent on each other. "You do know me! Need I tell you that I am Boyd Madras?" "Boyd Madras," she said, musing coldly. "A peculiar name."

"Mercy Madras was your name until you called yourself Mrs. Falchion," he urged indignantly, yet anxiously too.

"It suits you to be mysterious, Mr.—ah yes, Mr. Boyd Madras; but, really, you might be less exacting in your demands upon one's imagination." Her look was again on him casually.

He spoke breathlessly. "Mercy—Mercy—for God's sake, don't treat me like this! Oh, my wife, I have wronged you every way, but I loved you always—love you now. I have only followed you to ask you to forgive me, after all these years. I saw you in Colombo just before you came on board, and I felt that I must come also. You never loved me. Perhaps that is better for you, but you do not know what I suffer. If you could give me a chance, and come with me to America—anywhere, and let me start the world again? I can—travel straight now, and I will work hard, and be honest. I will—" But here sudden pain brought back the doubt concerning his life and its possibilities.

He leaned against the bulwarks, and made a helpless, despairing motion with his hand. "No, no!" he said; and added with a bitter laugh: "Not to begin the world again, but to end it as profitably and silently as I can. . . . But you will listen to me, my wife? You will say at least that you forgive me the blight and ill I brought upon you?"

She had listened to him unmoved outwardly. Her reply was instant. "You are more melodramatic than I thought you capable of being—from your appearance," she said in a hard tone. "Your acting is very good, but not convincing. I cannot respond as would become the unity and sequence of the play. . . . I have no husband. My husband is dead—I buried him years ago. I have forgotten his name—I buried that too."

All the suffering and endured scorn of years came to revolt in him. He leaned forward now, and caught her wrist. "Have you no human feeling?" he said "no heart in you at all? Look. I have it in me here suddenly to kill you as you stand. You have turned my love to hate. From your smooth skin there I could strip those rags, and call upon them all to look at you—my wife—a felon's wife; mine to have and to hold—to hold, you hear!—as it was sworn at the altar. I bare my heart to you, repenting, and you mock it, torture it, with your undying hate and cruelty. You have no heart, no life. This white bosom is all of you—all of your power to make men love you—this, and your beauty. All else, by God, is cruel as the grave!"

His voice had sunk to a hoarse whisper. She had not sought to remove his hand, nor struggled in the least; and once it seemed as if this new development of his character, this animal fierceness, would conquer her: she admired courage. It was not so. He trembled with weakness before he had finished. He stopped too soon; he lost.

"You will find such parts exhausting to play," she murmured, as he let her arm fall. "It needs a strong physique to endure exaggerated, nervous sentiment. And now, please, let us perform less trying scenes." Then, with a low, cold anger, she continued: "It is only a coward that will dog a woman who finds his presence insupportable to her. This woman cannot, if she would, endure this man's presence; it is her nature. Well, why rush blindly at the impossible? She wishes to live her spoiled life alone. The man can have no part in it—never, never! But she has money. If in that way—"

He stretched out his hand protestingly, the fingers spread in excitement. "No more—not another word!" he said. "I ask for forgiveness, for one word of kindness—and I am offered money! the fire that burned me to eat, instead of bread! I had a wife once," he added in a kind of troubled dream, looking at her as if she were very far away, "and her name was Mercy—her name was Mercy—Mercy Madras. I loved her. I sinned for her sake. A message came that she was dead to me; but I could not believe that

it was so altogether, for I had knelt at her feet and worshipped her. I went to her, but she sent me away angrily. Years passed. 'She will have relented now,' I said, and I followed her, and found her as I thought. But it was not she; it was a wicked ghost in her beautiful body—nothing more. And then I turned away and cursed all things, because I knew that I should never see my wife again. Mercy Madras was dead. . . . Can you not hear the curses?"

Still she was unmoved. She said with a cruel impatience in her voice: "Yes, Mercy Madras is dead. How then can she forgive? What could her ghost—as you call her—do, but offer the thing which her husband—when he was living—loved so well that he sold himself into bondage, and wrecked his world and hers for it—Money? Well, money is at his disposal, as she said before—"

But she spoke no more. The man in him straight way shamed her into silence with a look. She bowed her head, yet not quite in shame, for there was that in her eyes which made her appear as if his suffering was a gratuitous infliction. But at this moment he was stronger, and he drew her eyes up by the sheer force of his will. "I need no money now," he coldly declared. "I need nothing—not even you; and can you fancy that, after waiting all these years for this hour, money would satisfy me? Do you know," he continued slowly and musingly, "I can look upon you now—yes, at this moment—with more indifference than you ever showed to me? A moment ago I loved you: now I think you horrible; because you are no woman; you have a savage heart. And some day you will suffer as I do, so terribly that even the brazen serpent could not cure you. Then you will remember me."

He was about to leave her, but he had not taken two steps before he turned, with all the anger and the passion softened in his eyes, and said, putting his hand out towards yet not to touch her, "Good-bye—for the last time." And then the look was such as might be turned upon a forgiven executioner.

"Good-night," she replied, and she did not look into his eyes, but out to sea. Her eyes remained fixed upon its furtive gloom. She too was furtive and gloomy at this moment. They were both sleek, silent, and remorseless. There was a slight rustle to her dress as she changed her position. It was in grim keeping with the pitiless rustle of the sea.

And so they parted. I saw him move on towards the companion-way, and though I felt instinctively that all had gone ill with him, I was surprised to see how erect he walked. After a minute I approached her. She heard me coming, and presently turned to me with a curious smile. "Who is Mr. Charles Boyd?" she asked. "I did not pierce his disguise. I could not tell whether I had met him on board before. Have I? But my impression is that I had not seen him on the ship."

"No, you had not seen him," I replied. "He had a fancy to travel, until yesterday, with the second-class passengers. Now he has a first-class cabin—in his proper place, in fact."

"You think so—in his proper place?" The suggestion was not pleasant.

"Assuredly. Why do you speak in that way?" was my indignant reply.

She took my arm as we moved on. "Because he was slightly rude to me."

I grew bold, and determined to bring her to some sort of reckoning.

"How rude were you to him?"

"Not rude at all. It is not worth while being so—to anybody," was her chilly answer.

"I was under the impression you had met him before," I said gravely.

"Indeed? And why?" She raised her eyebrows at me. I pushed the matter to a conclusion. "He was ill the other day—he has heart trouble. It was necessary for me to open the clothes about his neck. On his breast I saw a little ivory portrait of a woman's head."

"A woman's head," she repeated absently, and her fingers idly toyed with a jingling ornament in her belt. In an idle moment I had sketched the head, as I remembered it, on a sheet of paper, and now I took it from my pocket and handed it to her. We were standing near a port-hole of the music saloon, from which light streamed.

"That is the head," said I.

She deliberately placed the paper in the belt of light, and, looking at it, remarked mechanically: "This is the head, is it?" She showed no change of countenance, and handed it back to me as if she had seen no likeness. "It is very interesting," she said, "but one would think you might make better use of your time than by surreptitiously sketching portraits from sick men's breasts. One must have plenty of leisure to do that sort of thing, I should think. Be careful that you do not get into mischief, Dr.

Marmion." She laughed. "Besides, where was the special peculiarity in that portrait that you should treasure it in pencil so conventionally?—Your drawing is not good.—Where was the point or need?"

"I have no right to reply to that directly," I responded. "But this man's life is not for always, and if anything happened to him it would seem curious to strangers to find that on his breast—because, of course, more than I would see it there."

"If anything happened? What should happen? You mean, on board ship?"
There was a little nervousness in her tone now.

"I am only hinting at an awkward possibility," I replied.

She looked at me scornfully. "When did you see that picture on his breast?" I told her. "Ah! before THAT day?" she rejoined. I knew that she referred to the evening when I had yielded foolishly to the fascination of her presence. The blood swam hotly in my face. "Men are not noble creatures," she continued.

"I am afraid you would not give many their patents of nobility if you had power to bestow them," I answered.

"Most men at the beginning, and very often ever after, are ignoble creatures. Yet I should confer the patents of nobility, if it were my prerogative; for some would succeed in living up to them. Vanity would accomplish that much. Vanity is the secret of noblesse oblige; not radical virtue—since we are beginning to be bookish again."

"To what do you reduce honour and right?" returned I.

"As I said to you on a memorable occasion," she answered very drily, "to a code."

"That is," rejoined I, "a man does a good action, lives an honourable life, to satisfy a social canon—to gratify, say, a wife or mother, who believes in him, and loves him?"

"Yes." She was watching Belle Treherne promenading with her father. She drew my attention to it by a slight motion of the hand, but why I could not tell.

"But might not a man fall by the same rule of vanity?" I urged. "That he shall appear well in their eyes, that their vanity in turn should be fed, might he not commit a crime, and so bring misery?"

"Yes, it is true either way—pleasure or misery. Please come to the saloon and get me an ice before the next dance."

I was perplexed. Was she altogether soulless? Even now, as we passed among the dancers, she replied to congratulations on her make-up and appearance with evident pleasure.

An hour later, I was taking Belle Treherne from the arm of Hungerford for the last waltz, and, in reply to an inquiring glance from him, I shook my head mournfully. His face showed solicitude as he walked away. Perhaps it did not gratify my vanity that Belle Treherne, as her father limped forward at the stroke of eight bells to take her below, said to me: "How downright and thorough Mr. Hungerford is!" But I frankly admitted that he was all she might say good of him, and more.

The deck was quickly dismantled, the lights went out, and all the dancers disappeared. The masquerade was over; and again, through the darkness, rose the plaintive "All's well!" And it kept ringing in my ears until it became a mocking sound, from which I longed to be free. It was like the voice of Lear crying over the body of Cordelia: "Never, never, never, never, never!"

Something of Hungerford's superstitious feeling possessed me. I went below, and involuntarily made my way to Boyd Madras's cabin.

Though the night was not hot, the door was drawn to. I tapped. His voice at once asked who was there, and when I told him, and inquired how he was, he said he was not ill, and asked me to come to his cabin in the morning, if I would. I promised, and bade him good-night. He responded, and then, as I turned away from the door, I heard him repeat the good-night cordially and calmly.

CHAPTER VII

The next morning I was up early, and went on deck. The sun had risen, and in the moist atmosphere the tints of sky and sea were beautiful. Everywhere was the warm ocean undulating lazily to the vague horizon. A few lascars were still cleansing the decks; others were seated on their haunches between decks, eating curry from a calabash; a couple of passengers were indolently munching oranges; and Stone the quartermaster was inspecting the work lately done by the lascars. Stone gave me a pleasant good-morning, and we walked together the length of the deck forward. I had got about three-fourths of the length back again, when I heard a cry from aft—a sharp call of "Man overboard!" In a moment I had travelled the intermediate deck, and was at the stern, looking below, where, in the swirling waters, was the head of a man. With cries of "Man overboard!" I threw two or three buoys after the disappearing head, above which a bare arm thrust itself. I heard the rush of feet behind me, and in a moment Hungerford and Stone were beside me. The signal was given for the engines to stop; stewards and lascars came running on deck in response to Hungerford's call, and the first officer now appeared. Very soon a crew was gathered on the after-deck, about a boat on the port side.

Passengers by this time showed in various stages of dressing— women wringing their hands, men gesticulating. If there is anything calculated to send a thrill of awe through a crowd, it is the cry of "Man overboard!" And when one looked below, and saw above the drowning head two white arms thrust from the sea, a horrible thing was brought home to each of us. Besides, the scene before us on the deck was not reassuring. There was trouble in getting the boat lowered. The first officer was excited, the lascars were dazed, the stewards were hurried without being confident; only Hungerford, Stone, and the gunner were collected. The boat should have been launched in a minute, but still it hung between its davits; its course downward was interrupted; something was wrong with the ropes, "A false start, by — !" said the bookmaker, looking through his eye-glass. Colonel Ryder's face was stern, Clovelly was pale and anxious, as moment after moment went, and the boat was not yet free. Ages seemed to pass before the boat was let down even with the bulwarks, and a crew of ten, with Hungerford in command, were in it, ready to be lowered. Whether the word was given to lower, or whether it was any one's fault, may never perhaps be known; but, as the boat hung there, suddenly it shot down at the stern, some one having let go the ropes at that end; and the bow being still fast, it had fallen like a trap-door. It seemed, on the instant, as if the whole crew were tossed into the water; but some had successfully clutched the boat's side, and Hungerford hung by a rope with one hand. In the eddying water, however, about the reversing screw, were two heads, and farther off was a man struggling. The face of one of the men near the screw was upturned for a moment; it was that of Stone the quartermaster.

A cry went up from the passengers, and they swayed forward to the suspended boat; but Colonel Ryder turned almost savagely upon them. "Keep quiet!" he said. "Stand back! What can you do? Give the officers a chance." He knew that there had been a false start, and bad work indeed; but he also saw that the task of the officers must not be made harder. His sternness had effect. The excited passengers drew back, and I took his place in front of them. When the first effort had been made to lower the boat, I asked the first officer if I could accompany the crew, but he said no. I could, therefore, do nothing but wait. A change came on the crowd. It became painfully silent, none speaking save in whispers, and all watching with anxious faces either the receding heads in the water or the unfortunate boat's crew. Hungerford showed himself a thorough sailor. Hanging to the davit, he quietly, reassuringly, gave the order for righting the boat, virtually taking the command out of the hands of the first officer, who was trembling with nervousness. Hungerford was right; this man's days as a sailor were over. The accident from which he had suffered had broken his nerve, stalwart as he was. But Hungerford was as cool as if this were ordinary boat-practice. Soon the boat was drawn up again, and others took the place of those who had disappeared. Then it was lowered safely, and, with Hungerford erect in the bows, it was pulled swiftly along the path we had come.

At length, too, the great ship turned round, but not in her tracks. It is a pleasant fiction that these great steamers are easily managed. They can go straight ahead, but their huge proportions are not adapted for rapid movement. However, the work of rescue was begun. Sailors were aloft on watch, Captain Ascott was on the bridge, sweeping the sea with his glass; order was restored. But the ship had the feeling of a home from which some familiar inmate had been taken, to return no more. Children clasped their mothers' hands and said, "Mother, was it the poor quartermaster?" and men who the day before had got help from the petty officers in the preparation of costumes, said mournfully: "Fife the gunner was one of them."

But who was the man first to go overboard—and who was it first gave the alarm? There were rumours, but no one was sure. All at once I remembered something peculiar in that cry of "Man overboard!" and it shocked me. I hurried below, and went to the cabin of Boyd Madras. It was empty; but on a shelf lay a large envelope, addressed to Hungerford and myself. I tore it open. There was a small packet, which I knew contained the portrait he had worn on his bosom, addressed to Mrs.

Falchion; and the other was a single sheet directed to me, fully written upon, and marked in the corner: "To be made public."

So, he had disappeared from the play? He had made his exit? He had satisfied the code at last? Before opening the letter addressed to me, I looked round. His clothes were folded upon one of the berths; but the garments of masquerade were not in the cabin. Had he then gone out of the world in the garb of a mummer? Not altogether, for the false beard he had worn the night before lay beside the clothes. But this terrible earnestness of his would look strange in last night's disguise.

I opened the packet addressed to Hungerford and myself, and saw that it contained a full and detailed account of his last meeting with his wife. The personal letter was short. He said that his gratitude was unspeakable, and now must be so for ever. He begged us not to let the world know who he was, nor his relationship to Mrs. Falchion, unless she wished it; he asked me to hand privately to her the packet bearing her name. Lastly, he requested that the paper for the public be given to the captain of the 'Fulvia'.

Going out into the passage, I found a steward, who hurriedly told me that just before the alarm was given he had seen Boyd Madras going aft in that strange costume, which he mistook for a dressing-gown, and he had come to see if, by any chance, it was he who had gone overboard. I told him that it was. He disappeared, and soon the whole ship knew it. I went to the captain, gave him the letter, and told him only what was necessary to tell. He was on the bridge, and was occupied with giving directions, so he asked me the substance of the letter, and handed it back to me, requesting me to make a copy of it soon and leave it in his cabin. I then took all the papers to my cabin, and locked them up. I give here the substance of the letter which was to be made public:

Because you know how much I have suffered physically while on board this ship, and because you have been kind to me, I wish, through you, to say my last word to the world: though, indeed, this may seem a strange form for gratitude to take. Dying men, however, make few apologies, and I shall make none. My existence, as you know, is an uncertain quantity, and may be cut short at any moment in the ordinary course of things. But I have no future in the active concerns of life; no past on which to dwell with satisfaction; no friends to mourn for my misfortunes in life, nor for my death, whether it be peaceful or violent; therefore, I have fewer compunctions in ending a mistaken career and a worthless life.

Some one will profit by my death: who it is matters not, for it is no friend of mine. My death adjusts a balance, perhaps not nicely, yet it does it. And this is all I have to say. . . . I am going. Farewell. . . .

After a brief farewell to me added, there came the subscription "Charles Boyd;" and that was all. Why he cried out "Man overboard" (for now I recognised that it was his voice which gave the alarm), I do not know, except that he wished his body to be recovered, and to receive burial.

Just here, some one came fumbling at the curtain of my cabin. I heard a gasp—"Doctor—my head! quick!"

I looked out. As I drew the curtain a worthless lascar sailor fell fainting into my cabin. He had been drinking a good deal, and the horror and excitement of the accident had brought on an apoplectic fit. This in a very hot climate is suddenly fatal. In three minutes, in spite of me, he was dead. Postponing report of the matter, I went on deck again among the passengers.

I expected that Mrs. Falchion would be among them, for the news must have gone to every part of the ship; but she was not there. On the outskirts of one of the groups, however, I saw Justine Caron. I went to her, and asked her if Mrs. Falchion had risen. She said that she had not: that she had been told of the disaster, and had appeared shocked; but had complained of a headache, and had not risen. I then asked Justine if Mrs. Falchion had been told who the suicide was, and was answered in the negative. At that moment a lady came to me and said in an awed whisper: "Dr. Marmion, is it true that the man who committed suicide was a second-class passenger, and that he appeared at the ball last night, and danced with Mrs. Falchion?"

I knew that my reply would soon become common property, so I said:

"He was a first-class passenger, though until yesterday he travelled second-class. I knew him. His name was Charles Boyd. I introduced him to Mrs. Falchion last night, but he did not stay long on deck, because he felt ill. He had heart trouble. You may guess that he was tired of life." Then I told her of the paper which was for the public, and she left me.

The search for the unfortunate men went on. No one could be seen near the floating buoys which

were here and there picked up by Hungerford's boat. The long undulations of the water had been broken up in a large area about the ship, but the sea was still comparatively smooth. We were steaming back along the track we had come. There was less excitement on board than might be expected. The tropical stillness of the air, the quiet suddenness of the tragedy itself, the grim decisiveness of Hungerford, the watchful silence of a few men like Colonel Ryder and Clovelly, had effect upon even the emotion of those women, everywhere found, who get a morbid enjoyment out of misery.

Nearly all were watching the rescue boat, though a few looked over the sides of the ship as if they expected to find bodies floating about. They saw sharks, instead, and a trail of blood, and this sent them away sickened from the bulwarks. Then they turned their attention again upon the rescue party. It was impossible not to note what a fine figure Hungerford made, as he stood erect in the bow, his hand over his eyes, searching the water. Presently we saw him stop the boat, and something was drawn in. He signalled the ship. He had found one man—but dead or alive? The boat was rapidly rowed back to the ship, Hungerford making efforts for resuscitation. Arrived at the vessel, the body was passed up to me.

It was that of Stone the quartermaster. I worked to bring back life, but it was of no avail. A minute after, a man in the yards signalled that he saw another. It was not a hundred yards away, and was floating near the surface. It was a strange sight, for the water was a vivid green, and the man wore garments of white and scarlet, and looked a part of some strange mosaic: as one has seen astonishing figures set in balls of solid glass. This figure framed in the sea was Boyd Madras. The boat was signalled, it drew near, and two men dragged the body in, as a shark darted forward, just too late, to seize it. The boat drew alongside the 'Fulvia'. I stood at the gangway to receive this castaway. I felt his wrist and heart. As I did so I chanced to glance up at the passengers, who were looking at this painful scene from the upper deck. There, leaning over the railing, stood Mrs. Falchion, her eyes fixed with a shocking wonder at the drooping, weird figure. Her lips parted, but at first they made no sound. Then, she suddenly drew herself up with a shudder. "Horrible! horrible!" she said, and turned away.

I had Boyd Madras taken to an empty cabin next to mine, which I used for operations, and there Hungerford and myself worked to resuscitate him. We allowed no one to come near. I had not much hope of bringing life back, but still we worked with a kind of desperation, for it seemed to Hungerford and myself that somehow we were responsible to humanity for him. His heart had been weak, but there had been no organic trouble: only some functional disorder, which open-air life and freedom from anxiety might have overcome. Hungerford worked with an almost fierce persistence. Once he said: "By God, I will bring him back, Marmion, to face that woman down when she thinks she has got the world on the hip!"

I cannot tell what delight we felt when, after a little time, I saw a quiver of the eyelids and a slight motion of the chest. Presently a longer breath came, and the eyes opened; at first without recognition. Then, in a few moments, I knew that he was safe—desperately against his will, but safe.

His first sentient words startled me. He gasped, "Does she think I am drowned?"

"Yes."

"Then she must continue to do so!"

"Why?"

"Because"—here he spoke faintly, as if sudden fear had produced additional weakness—"because I had rather die a thousand deaths than meet her now; because she hates me. I must begin the world again. You have saved my life against my will: I demand that you give that life its only chance of happiness."

As his words came to me, I remembered with a start the dead lascar, and, leading Hungerford to my cabin, I pointed to the body, and whispered that the sailor's death was only known to me. "Then this is the corpse of Boyd Madras, and we'll bury it for him," he said with quick bluntness. "Do not report this death to Captain Ascott—he would only raise objections to the idea. This lascar was in my watch. It will be supposed he fell overboard during the accident to the boat. Perhaps some day the funeral of this nigger will be a sensation and surprise to her blessed ladyship on deck."

I suggested that it seemed underhand and unprofessional, but the entreating words of the resuscitated man in the next room conquered my objections.

It was arranged that Madras should remain in the present cabin, of which I had a key, until we reached Aden; then he should, by Hungerford's aid, disappear.

We were conspirators, but we meant harm to nobody. I covered up the face of the dead lascar and wrapped round him the scarlet and gold cloth that Madras had worn. Then I got a sailor, who supposed

Boyd Madras was before him, and the body was soon sewed in its shotted shroud and carried to where Stone the quartermaster lay.

At this day I cannot suppose I would do these things, but then it seemed right to do as Madras wished: he was, under a new name, to begin life afresh.

After giving directions for the disposition of the bodies, I went on deck. Mrs. Falchion was still there. Some one said to her: "Did you know the man who committed suicide?"

"He was introduced to me last night by Dr. Marmion," she replied, and she shuddered again, though her face showed no remarkable emotion. She had had a shock to the senses, not to the heart.

When I came to her on the deck, Justine was saying to her: "Madame, you should not have come. You should not see such painful things when you are not well."

She did not reply to this. She looked up at me and said: "A strange whim, to die in those fanciful rags. It is dreadful to see; but he had the courage."

I replied: "They have as much courage who make men do such things and then live on."

Then I told her briefly that I held the packet for her, that I guessed what was in it, and that I would hand it to her later. I also said that he had written to me the record of last night's meeting with her, and that he had left a letter which was to be made public. As I said these things we were walking the decks, and, because eyes were on both of us, I tried to show nothing more unusual in manner than the bare tragedy might account for.

"Well," she said, with a curious coldness, "what use shall you make of your special knowledge?"

"I intend," I said, "to respect his wish, that your relationship to him be kept unknown, unless you declare otherwise."

"That is reasonable. If he had always been as reasonable! And," she continued, "I do not wish the relationship to be known: practically there is none. . . . Oh! oh!" she added, with a sudden change in her voice, "why did he do as he did, and make everything else impossible— impossible! . . . Send me, or give me the packet, when you wish: and now please leave me, Dr. Marmion."

The last few words were spoken with some apparent feeling, but I knew she was thinking of herself most, and I went from her angry.

I did not see her again before the hour that afternoon when we should give the bodies of the two men to the ocean. No shroud could be prepared for gunner Fife and able-seaman Winter, whose bodies had no Christian burial, but were swallowed by the eager sea, not to be yielded up even for a few hours. We were now steaming far beyond the place where they were lost.

The burial was an impressive sight, as burials at sea mostly are. The lonely waters stretching to the horizon helped to make it so. There was a melancholy majesty in the ceremony.

The clanging bell had stopped. Captain Ascott was in his place at the head of the rude draped bier. In the silence one only heard the swish of water against the 'Fulvia's' side, as we sped on towards Aden. People do not know how beautiful, how powerful, is the burial service in the Book of Common Prayer, who have only heard it recited by a clergyman. To hear it read by a hardy man, whose life is among stern duties, is to receive a new impression. He knows nothing of lethargic monotone; he interprets as he reads. And when the man is the home-spun captain of a ship, who sees before him the poor shell of one that served him for ten years, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord," has a strange significance. It is only men who have borne the shock of toil and danger, and have beaten up against the world's buffetings, that are fit to say last words over those gone down in the storm or translated in the fiery chariot of duty.

The engines suddenly stopped. The effect was weird. Captain Ascott's fingers trembled, and he paused for an instant and looked down upon the dead, then out sorrowfully to the waiting sea, before he spoke the words, "We therefore commit their bodies to the deep." But, the moment they were uttered, the bier was lifted, there was a swift plunge, and only the flag and the empty boards were left. The sobbing of women now seemed almost unnatural; for around us was the bright sunlight, the gay dresses of the lascars, the sound of the bell striking the hours, and children playing on the deck. The ship moved on.

And Mrs. Falchion? As the burial service was read, she had stood, and looked, not at the bier, but straight out to sea, calm and apparently unsympathetic, though, as she thought, her husband was being buried. When, however, the weighted body divided the water with a swingeing sound, her face

suddenly suffused, as though shame had touched her or some humiliating idea had come. But she turned to Justine almost immediately, and soon after said calmly: "Bring a play of Moliere, and read to me, Justine."

I had the packet her supposed dead husband had left for her in my pocket. I joined her, and we paced the deck, at first scarcely speaking, while the passengers dispersed, some below, some to the smoking-rooms, some upon deck-chairs to doze through the rest of the lazy afternoon. The world had taken up its orderly course again. At last, in an unfrequented corner of the deck, I took the packet from my pocket and handed it to her. "You understand?" I asked.

"Yes, I understand. And now, may I beg that for the rest of your natural life"—here she paused, and bit her lip in vexation that the unlucky phrase had escaped her—"you will speak of this no more?"

"Mrs. Boyd Madras," I said (here she coloured indignantly),—"pardon me for using the name, but it is only this once,—I shall never speak of the matter to you again, nor to any one else, unless there is grave reason."

We walked again in silence. Passing the captain's cabin, we saw a number of gentlemen gathered about the door, while others were inside. We paused, to find what the incident was. Captain Ascott was reading the letter which Boyd Madras had wished to be made public. (I had given it to him just before the burial, and he was acting as though Boyd Madras was really dead—he was quite ignorant of our conspiracy.) I was about to move on, but Mrs. Falchion touched my arm. "Wait," she said. She stood and heard the letter through. Then we walked on, she musing. Presently she said: "It is a pity—a pity."

I looked at her inquiringly, but she offered no explanation of the enigmatical words. But, at this moment, seeing Justine waiting, she excused herself, and soon I saw her listening to Moliere. Later in the day I saw her talking with Miss Treherne, and it struck me that she had never looked so beautiful as then, and that Miss Treherne had never seemed so perfect a product of a fine convention. But, watching them together, one who had had any standard of good life could never have hesitated between the two. It was plain to me that Mrs. Falchion was bent upon making a conquest of this girl who so delicately withstood her; and Belle Treherne has told me since, that, when in her presence, and listening to her, she was irresistibly drawn to her; though at the same time she saw there was some significant lack in her nature; some hardness impossible to any one who had ever known love. She also told me that on this occasion Mrs. Falchion did not mention my name, nor did she ever in their acquaintance, save in the most casual fashion. Her conversation with Miss Treherne was always far from petty gossip or that smart comedy in which some women tell much personal history, with the guise of badinage and bright cynicism. I confess, though, it struck me unpleasantly at the time, that this fresh, high-hearted creature should be in familiar conversation with a woman who, it seemed to me, was the incarnation of cruelty.

Mrs. Falchion subscribed most liberally to the fund raised for the children of the quartermaster and munificently to that for the crew which had, under Hungerford, performed the rescue work. The only effect of this was to deepen the belief that she was very wealthy, and could spend her money without affectation; for it was noticeable that she, of all on board, showed the least outward excitement at the time of the disaster. It occurred to me that once or twice I had seen her eyes fixed on Hungerford inquisitively, and not free from antipathy. It was something behind her usual equanimity. Her intuitive observation had led her to trace his hand in recent events. Yet I know she admired him too for his brave conduct. The day following the tragedy we were seated at dinner. The captain and most of the officers had risen, but Mrs. Falchion, having come in late, was still eating, and I remained seated also. Hungerford approached me, apologising for the interruption. He remarked that he was going on the bridge, and wished to say something to me before he went. It was an official matter, to which Mrs. Falchion apparently did not listen. When he was about to turn away, he bowed to her rather distantly; but she looked up at him and said, with an equivocal smile:

"Mr. Hungerford, we often respect brave men whom we do not like."

Then he, understanding her, but refusing to recognise the compliment, not altogether churlishly replied: "And I might say the same of women, Mrs. Falchion; but there are many women we dislike who are not brave."

"I think I could recognise a brave man without seeing his bravery," she urged.

"But I am a blundering sailor," he rejoined, "who only believes his eyes."

"You are young yet," she replied.

"I shall be older to-morrow," was his retort.

"Well, perhaps you will see better to-morrow," she rejoined, with indolent irony.

"If I do, I'll acknowledge it," he added. Then Hungerford smiled at me inscrutably. We two held a strange secret.

CHAPTER VIII

A BRIDGE OF PERIL

No more delightful experience may be had than to wake up in the harbour of Aden some fine morning—it is always fine there—and get the first impression of that mighty fortress, with its thousand iron eyes, in strong repose by the Arabian Sea. Overhead was the cloudless sun, and everywhere the tremulous glare of a sandy shore and the creamy wash of the sea, like fusing opals. A tiny Mohammedan mosque stood gracefully where the ocean almost washed its steps, and the Resident's house, far up the hard hillside, looked down upon the harbour from a green coolness. The place had a massive, war-like character. Here was a battery with earthworks; there, a fort; beyond, a signal-staff. Hospitals, hotels, and stores were incidents in the picture. Beyond the mountain-wall and lofty Jebel Shamsan, rising in fine pink and bronze, and at the end of a high-walled path between the great hills, lay the town of Aden proper. Above the town again were the mighty Tanks, formed out of clefts in the mountains, and built in the times when the Phoenicians made Aden a great mart, the richest spot in all Arabia.

Over to the left, on the opposite side of the harbour, were wide bungalows shining in the sun, and flanking the side of the ancient aqueduct, the gigantic tomb of an Arab sheikh. In the harbour were the men-of-war of all nations, and Arab dhows sailed slowly in, laden with pilgrims for Mecca—masses of picturesque sloth and dirt—and disease also; for more than one vessel flew the yellow flag. As we looked, a British man-of-war entered the gates of the harbour in the rosy light. It was bringing back the disabled and wounded from a battle, in which a handful of British soldiers were set to punish thirty times their number in an unknown country. But there was another man-of-war in port with which we were familiar. We passed it far out on the Indian Ocean. It again passed us, and reached Aden before we did. The 'Porcupine' lay not far from the 'Fulvia', and as I leaned over the bulwarks, idly looking at her, a boat shot away from her side, and came towards us. As it drew near, I saw that it was filled with luggage—a naval officer's, I knew it to be. As the sailors hauled it up, I noticed that the initials upon the portmanteaus were G. R. The owner was evidently an officer going home on leave, or invalided. It did not, however, concern me, as I thought, and I turned away to look for Mr. Treherne, that I might fulfil my promise to escort his daughter and Mrs. Callendar to the general cemetery at Aden; for I knew he was not fit to do the journey, and there was nothing to prevent my going.

A few hours later I stood with Miss Treherne and Mrs. Callendar in the graveyard beside the fortress-wall, placing wreaths of artificial flowers and one or two natural roses—a chance purchase from a shop at the port—on the grave of the young journalist. Miss Treherne had brought some sketching materials, and both of us (for, as has been suggested, I had a slight gift for drawing) made sketches of the burial-place. Having done this, we moved away to other parts of the cemetery, looking at the tombstones, many of which told sad tales enough of those who died far away from home and friends. As we wandered on, I noticed a woman kneeling beside a grave. It grew upon me that the figure was familiar. Presently I saw who it was, for the face lifted. I excused myself, went over to her, and said:—"Miss Caron, you are in trouble?"

She looked up, her eyes swimming with tears and pointed to the tombstone.
On it I read:

Sacred to the Memory of
HECTOR CARON,
Ensign in the French Navy.

Erected by his friend, Galt Roscoe,
H.B.M.N.

Beneath this was the simple line:

"Why, what evil hath he done?"

"He was your brother?" I asked.

"Yes, monsieur, my one brother." Her tears dropped slowly.

"And Galt Roscoe, who was he?" asked I.

Through her grief her face was eloquent. "I never saw him—never knew him," she said. "He saved my poor Hector from much suffering; he nursed him, and buried him here when he died, and then—that!" pointing to the tombstone. "He made me love the English," she said. "Some day I shall find him, and I shall have money to pay him back all he spent—all." Now I guessed the meaning of the scene on board the 'Fulvia', when she had been so anxious to preserve her present relations with Mrs. Falchion. This was the secret—a beautiful one. She rose. "They disgraced Hector in New Caledonia," she said, "because he refused to punish a convict at Ile Nou who did not deserve it. He determined to go to France to represent his case. He left me behind, because we were poor. He went to Sydney. There he came to know this good man,"—her finger gently felt his name upon the stone,— "who made him a guest upon his ship; and so he came on towards England. In the Indian Ocean he was taken ill: and this was the end."

She mournfully sank again beside the grave, but she was no longer weeping.

"What was this officer's vessel?" I said presently. She drew from her dress a letter. "It is here. Please read it all. He wrote that to me when Hector died."

The superscription to the letter was—H.B.M.S. Porcupine.

I might have told her then that the 'Porcupine' was in the harbour at Aden, but I felt that things would work out to due ends without my help—which, indeed, they began to do immediately. As we stood there in silence, I reading over and over again the line upon the pedestal, I heard footsteps behind, and, turning, I saw a man approaching us, who, from his manner, though he was dressed in civilian's clothes, I guessed to be an officer of the navy. He was of more than middle height, had black hair, dark blue eyes, straight, strongly-marked brows, and was clean-shaven. He was a little ascetic-looking, and rather interesting and uncommon, and yet he was unmistakably a sea-going man. It was a face that one would turn to look at again and again—a singular personality. And yet my first glance told me that he was not one who had seen much happiness. Perhaps that was not unattractive in itself, since people who are very happy, and show it, are often most selfish too, and repel where they should attract. He was now standing near the grave, and his eyes were turned from one to the other of us, at last resting on Justine.

Presently I saw a look of recognition. He stepped quickly forward. "Mademoiselle, will you pardon me?" he said very gently, "but you remind me of one whose grave I came to see." His hand made a slight motion toward Hector Caron's resting-place. Her eyes were on him with an inquiring earnestness. "Oh, monsieur, is it possible that you are my brother's friend and rescuer?"

"I am Roscoe. He was my good friend," he said to her, and he held out his hand. She took it, and kissed it impulsively. He flushed, and drew it back quickly and shyly.

"Some day I shall be able to repay you for all your goodness," she said. "I am only grateful now—grateful altogether. And you will tell me all you knew of him—all that he said and did before he died?"

"I will gladly tell you all I know," he answered, and he looked at her compassionately, and yet with a little scrutiny, as though to know more of her and how she came to be in Aden. He turned to me inquiringly.

I interpreted his thought by saying: "I am the surgeon of the 'Fulvia'. I chanced upon Miss Caron here. She is travelling by the 'Fulvia'."

With a faint voice, Justine here said: "Travelling—with my mistress."

"As companion to a lady," I preferred to add in explanation, for I wished not to see her humble herself so. A look of understanding came into Roscoe's face. Then he said: "I am glad that I shall see more of you; I am to travel by the 'Fulvia' also to London."

"Yet I am afraid I shall see very little of you," she quietly replied.

He was about to say something to her, but she suddenly swayed and would have fallen, but that he caught her and supported her. The weakness lasted only for a moment, and then, steadying herself, she said to both of us: "I hope you will say nothing of this to madame? She is kind, most kind, but she hates illness—and such things."

Galt Roscoe looked at me to reply, his face showing clearly that he thought "madame" an extraordinary woman. I assured Justine that we would say nothing. Then Roscoe cordially parted from us, saying that he would look forward to seeing us both on the ship; but before he finally went, he put on the grave a small bouquet from his buttonhole. Then I excused myself from Justine, and, going over to Miss Treherne, explained to her the circumstances, and asked her if she would go and speak to the afflicted girl. She and Mrs. Callendar had been watching the incident, and they eagerly listened to me. I think this was the moment that I first stood really well with Belle Treherne. Her sympathy for the bereaved girl flooded many barriers between herself and me.

"Oh," she said quickly, "indeed I will go to her, poor girl! Will you come also, Mrs. Callendar?"

But Mrs. Callendar timidly said she would rather Miss Treherne went without her; and so it was. While Miss Treherne was comforting the bereaved girl, I talked to Mrs. Callendar. I fear that Mrs. Callendar was but a shallow woman; for, after a moment of excitable interest in Justine, she rather naively turned the talk upon the charms of Europe. And, I fear, not without some slight cynicism, I followed her where she led; for, as I said to myself, it did not matter what direction our idle tongues took, so long as I kept my mind upon the two beside that grave: but it gave my speech a spice of malice. I dwelt upon Mrs. Callendar's return to her native heath—that is, the pavements of Bond Street and Piccadilly, although I knew that she was a native of Tasmania. At this she smiled egregiously.

At length Miss Treherne came to us and said that Justine insisted she was well enough to go back to the vessel alone, and wished not to be accompanied. So we left her there.

A score of times I have stopped when preparing my notes for this tale from my diary and those of Mrs. Falchion and Galt Roscoe, to think how, all through the events recorded here, and many others omitted, Justine Caron was like those devoted and, often, beautiful attendants of the heroes and heroines of tragedy, who, when all is over, close the eyes, compose the bodies, and cover the faces of the dead, pronouncing with just lips the benediction, fittest in their mouths. Their loves, their deeds, their lives, however good and worthy, were clothed in modesty and kept far up the stage, to be, even when everything was over, not always given the privilege to die as did their masters, but, like Horatio, bade to live and be still the loyal servant:

"But in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,
To tell my story."

There was no reason why we should go to the ship immediately, and I proposed that we should first explore the port-town, and then visit the city of Aden—five miles away beyond the hills—and the Tanks. To this the ladies consented.

Somauli policemen patrolled the streets; Somauli, Arab, and Turkish guides impeded the way; Arabs in plain white, Arab sheikhs in blue and white, and gold, lounged languidly about, or drank their coffee in the shade of the bazaars. Children of the desert, nearly naked, sprinkled water before the doors of the bazaars and stores and upon the hot thoroughfare, from long leather bottles; caravans of camels, with dusty stride, swung up the hillside and beyond into the desert; the Jewish water-carrier with his donkey trudged down the pass from the cool fountains in the volcanic hills; a guard of eunuchs marched by with the harem of a Mohammedan; in the doorways of the houses goats and donkeys fed. Jews, with greasy faces, red-hemmed skirt, and hungry look, moved about, offering ostrich feathers for sale, everywhere treated worse than the Chinaman in Oregon or at Port Darwin. We saw English and Australian passengers of the 'Fulvia' pelting the miserable members of a despised race with green fruit about the streets, and afterwards from the deck of the ship. A number of these raised their hats to us as they passed; but Belle Treherne's acknowledgment was chilly.

"It is hard to be polite to cowards," she said.

After having made some ruinous bargains in fezes, Turkish cloths and perfume, I engaged a trap, and we started for Aden. The journey was not one of beauty, but it had singular interest. Every turn of the wheels carried us farther and farther away from a familiar world to one of yesterday. White-robed warriors of the desert, with lances, bent their brows upon us as they rode away towards the endless sands, and vagabonds of Egypt begged for alms. In about three-quarters of an hour we had passed the lofty barriers of Jebel Shamsan and its comrades, and were making clouds of dust in the streets of Aden. In spite of the cantonments, the British Government House, and the European Church, it was an Oriental town pure and simple, where the slow-footed hours wandered by, leaving apathy in their train; where sloth and surfeit sat in the market-places; idle women gossiped in their doorways; and naked children rolled in the sun. Yet how, in the most unfamiliar places, does one wake suddenly to hear or see some most familiar thing, and learn again that the ways of all people and nations are not, after all, so far apart! Here three naked youths, with trays upon their heads, cried aloud at each doorway what, interpreted, was: "Pies! Hot pies! Pies all hot!" or, "Crum-pet! Crum-pet! Won't you buy-uy a crum-pet!"

One sees the same thing in Kandy, in Calcutta, in Tokio, in Istamboul, in Teheran, in Queensland, in London.

To us the great Tanks overlooking the place were more interesting than the town itself, and we drove thither. At Government House and here were the only bits of green that we had seen; they were, in fact, the only spots of verdure on the peninsula of Aden. It was a very sickly green, from which wan and dusty fig trees rose. In their scant shadow, or in the shelter of an overhanging ledge of rock, Arabs offered us draughts of cool water, and oranges. There were people in the sickly gardens, and others were inspecting the Tanks. Passengers from the ship had brought luncheon-baskets to this sad oasis.

As we stood at the edge of one of the Tanks, Miss Treherne remarked with astonishment that they were empty. I explained to her that Aden did not have the benefits conferred even on the land of the seven fat and seven lean kine—that there had not been rain there for years, and that when it did come it was neither prolonged nor plentiful. Then came questions as to how long ago the Tanks were built.

"Thirteen hundred years!" she exclaimed. "How strange to feel it so! It is like looking at old graves. And how high the walls are, closing up the gorge between the hills."

At that moment Mrs. Callendar drew our attention to Mrs. Falchion and a party from the ship. Mrs. Falchion was but a few paces from us, smiling agreeably as she acknowledged our greetings. Presently two of her party came to us and asked us to share their lunch. I would have objected, and I am certain Belle Treherne would gladly have done so, but Mrs. Callendar was anxious to accept, therefore we expressed our gratitude and joined the group. On second thoughts I was glad that we did so, because, otherwise, my party must have been without refreshments until they returned to the ship—the restaurants at Aden are not to be trusted. To me Mrs. Falchion was pleasantly impersonal, to Miss Treherne delicately and actively personal. At the time I had a kind of fear of her interest in the girl, but I know now that it was quite sincere, though it began with a motive not very lofty—to make Belle Treherne her friend, and so annoy me, and also to study, as would an anatomist, the girl's life.

We all moved into the illusive shade of the fig and magnolia trees, and lunch was soon spread. As we ate, conversation turned upon the annoying persistency of Eastern guides, and reference was made to the exciting circumstances attending the engagement of Amshar, the guide of Mrs. Falchion's party. Among a score of claimants, Amshar had had one particular opponent—a personal enemy—who would not desist even when the choice had been made. He, indeed, had been the first to solicit the party, and was rejected because of his disagreeable looks. He had even followed the trap from the Port of Aden. As one of the gentlemen was remarking on the muttered anger of the disappointed Arab, Mrs. Falchion said: "There he is now at the gate of the garden."

His look was sullenly turned upon our party. Blackburn, the Queenslander said, "Amshar, the other fellow is following up the game," and pointed to the gate.

Amshar understood the gesture at least, and though he gave a toss of the head, I noticed that his hand trembled as he handed me a cup of water, and that he kept his eyes turned on his opponent.

"One always feels unsafe with these cut-throat races," said Colonel Ryder, "as some of us know, who have had to deal with the nigger of South America. They think no more of killing a man—"

"Than an Australian squatter does of dispersing a mob of aboriginals or kangaroos," said Clovelly.

Here Mrs. Callendar spoke up briskly. "I don't know what you mean by 'dispersing.'"

"You know what a kangaroo battue is, don't you?"

"But that is killing, slaughtering kangaroos by the hundred."

"Well, and that is aboriginal dispersion," said the novelist. "That is the aristocratic method of legislating the native out of existence."

Blackburn here vigorously protested. "Yes, it's very like a novelist, on the hunt for picturesque events, to spend his forensic soul upon 'the poor native,'—upon the dirty nigger, I choose to call him: the meanest, cruellest, most cowardly, and murderous—by Jove, what a lot of adjectives!—of native races. But we fellows, who have lost some of the best friends we ever had—chums with whom we've shared blanket and tucker—by the crack of a nulla-nulla in the dark, or a spear from the scrub, can't find a place for Exeter Hall and its 'poor native' in our hard hearts. We stand in such a case for justice. It is a new country. Not once in fifty times would law reach them. Reprisal and dispersion were the only things possible to men whose friends had been massacred, and—well, they punished tribes for the acts of individuals."

Mrs. Falchion here interposed. "That is just what England does. A British trader is killed. She sweeps a native town out of existence with Hotchkiss guns—leaves it naked and dead. That is dispersion too; I have seen it, and I know how far niggers as a race can be trusted, and how much they deserve sympathy. I agree with Mr. Blackburn."

Blackburn raised his glass. "Mrs. Falchion," he said, "I need no further evidence to prove my case. Experience is the best teacher."

"As I wish to join the chorus to so notable a compliment, will somebody pass the claret?" said Colonel Ryder, shaking the crumbs of a pate from his coat-collar. When his glass was filled, he turned towards Mrs. Falchion, and continued: "I drink to the health of the best teacher." And every one laughingly responded. This impromptu toast would have been drunk with more warmth, if we could have foreseen an immediate event. Not less peculiar were Mrs. Falchion's words to Hungerford the evening before, recorded in the last sentence of the preceding chapter.

Cigars were passed, and the men rose and strolled away. We wandered outside the gardens, passing the rejected guide as we did so. "I don't like the look in his eye," said Clovelly.

Colonel Ryder laughed. "You've always got a fine vision for the dramatic."

We passed on. I suppose about twenty minutes had gone when, as we were entering the garden again, we heard loud cries. Hurrying forward towards the Tanks, we saw a strange sight.

There, on a narrow wall dividing two great tanks, were three people— Mrs. Falchion, Amshar, and the rejected Arab guide. Amshar was crouching behind Mrs. Falchion, and clinging to her skirts in abject fear. The Arab threatened with a knife. He could not get at Amshar without thrusting Mrs. Falchion aside, and, as I said, the wall was narrow. He was bent like a tiger about to spring.

Seeing Mrs. Falchion and Amshar apart from the others,—Mrs. Falchion having insisted on crossing this narrow and precipitous wall,—he had suddenly rushed after them. As he did so, Miss Treherne saw him, and cried out. Mrs. Falchion faced round swiftly, and then came this tragic situation.

Some one must die.

Seeing that Mrs. Falchion made no effort to dislodge Amshar from her skirts, the Arab presently leaped forward. Mrs. Falchion's arms went out suddenly, and she caught the wrist that held the dagger. Then there was an instant's struggle. It was Mrs. Falchion's life now, as well as Amshar's. They swayed. They hung on the edge of the rocky chasm. Then we lost the gleam of the knife, and the Arab shivered, and toppled over. Mrs. Falchion would have gone with him, but Amshar caught her about the waist, and saved her from the fall which would have killed her as certainly as it killed the Arab lying at the bottom of the tank. She had managed to turn the knife in the Arab's hand against his own breast, and then suddenly pressed her body against it; but the impulse of the act came near carrying her over also.

Amshar was kneeling at her feet, and kissing her gown gratefully. She pushed him away with her foot, and, coolly turning aside, began to arrange her hair. As I approached her, she glanced down at the Arab. "Horrible! horrible!" she said. I remembered that these were her words when her husband was lifted from the sea to the 'Fulvia'.

Not ungently, she refused my hand or any assistance, and came down among the rest of the party. I could not but feel a strange wonder at the powerful side of her character just shown—her courage, her cool daring. In her face now there was a look of annoyance, and possibly disgust, as well as of triumph—so natural in cases of physical prowess. Everybody offered congratulations, but she only showed real pleasure, and that mutely, at those of Miss Treherne. To the rest of us she said: "One had to save one's self, and Amshar was a coward."

And so this woman, whose hardness of heart and excessive cruelty Hungerford and I were keeping from the world, was now made into a heroine, around whom a halo of romance would settle whenever her name should be mentioned. Now, men, eligible and ineligible, would increase their homage. It seemed as if the stars had stopped in their courses to give her special fortune.

That morning I had thought her appearance at this luncheon-party was little less than scandalous, for she knew, if others did not, who Boyd Madras was. After the occurrence with the Arab, the other event was certainly much less prominent, and here, after many years, I can see that the act was less in her than it would have been in others. For, behind her outward hardness, there was a sort of justice working, an iron thing, but still not unnatural in her.

Belle Treherne awakened also to a new perception of her character, and a kind of awe possessed her, so masculine seemed her courage, yet so womanly and feminine her manner. Mrs. Callendar was loud

in her exclamations of delight and wonder at Mrs. Falchion's coolness; and the bookmaker, with his usual impetuosity, offered to take bets at four to one that we should all be detained to give evidence in the matter.

Clovelly was silent. He occasionally adjusted his glasses, and looked at Mrs. Falchion as if he had suddenly come to a full stop in his opinions regarding her. This, I think, was noticed by her, and enjoyed too, for she doubtless remembered her conversation with me, in which she had said that Clovelly thought he understood her perfectly. Colonel Ryder, who was loyal at all times, said she had the nerve of a woman from Kentucky. Moreover, he had presence of mind, for he had immediately sent off a native to inform the authorities of what had occurred; so that before we had got half-way to the town we were met by policemen running towards us, followed by a small detachment of Indian soldiers. The officer in command of the detachment stopped us, and said that the governor would be glad if we would come to Government House for an hour, while an inquiry was being held.

To this we cheerfully consented, of course; and, in a room where punkahs waved and cool claret-cup awaited us, we were received by the governor, who was full of admiration of Mrs. Falchion. It was plain, however, that he was surprised at her present equanimity. Had she no nerves at all?

"I can only regret exceedingly," said the governor, "that your visit to Aden has had such a tragical interruption; but since it has occurred, I am glad to have the privilege of meeting a lady so brave as Mrs. Falchion."—The bookmaker had introduced us all with a naivete that, I am sure, amused the governor, as it certainly did his aide-de-camp. "We should not need to fear the natives if we had soldiers as fearless," his excellency continued.

At this point the inquiry began, and, after it was over, the governor said that there the matter ended so far as we were concerned, and then he remarked gallantly that the Government of Aden would always remain Mrs. Falchion's debtor. She replied that it was a debt she would be glad to preserve unsettled for ever. After this pretty exchange of compliments, the governor smiled, and offered her his arm to the door, where our 'char a bans' awaited us.

So impressed was the bookmaker with the hospitable reception the governor had given us, that he offered him his cigar-case with its contents, said he hoped they would meet again, and asked his excellency if he thought of coming to Australia. The governor declined the cigars graciously, ignored the hoped-for pleasure of another meeting, and trusted that it might fall to his lot to visit Australia some day. Thereupon the bookmaker insisted on the aide-de-camp accepting the cigar-case, and gave him his visiting-card. The aide-de-camp lost nothing by his good-humoured acceptance, if he smoked, because, as I knew, the cigars were very good indeed. Bookmakers, gamblers and Jews are good judges of tobacco. And the governor's party lost nothing in dignity because, as the traps wheeled away, they gave a polite little cheer for Mrs. Falchion. I, at first, was fearful how Belle Treherne would regard the gaucheries of the bookmaker, but I saw that he was rather an object of interest to her than otherwise; for he was certainly amusing.

As we drove through Aden, a Somauli lad ran from the door of a house, and handed up a letter to the driver of my trap. It bore my name, and was handed over to me. I recognised the handwriting. It was that of Boyd Madras. He had come ashore by Hungerford's aid in the night. The letter simply gave an address in England that would always find him, and stated that he intended to take another name.

CHAPTER IX

"THE PROGRESS OF THE SUNS"

News of the event had preceded us to the 'Fulvia', and, as we scrambled out on the ship's stairs, cheers greeted us. Glancing up, I saw Hungerford, among others, leaning over the side, and looking at Mrs. Falchion in a curious cogitating fashion, not unusual to him. The look was non-committal, yet earnest. If it was not approval, it was not condemnation; but it might have been slightly ironical, and that annoyed me. It seemed impossible for him—and it was so always, I believe—to get out of his mind the thought of the man he had rescued on No Man's Sea. I am sure it jarred upon him that the band foolishly played a welcome when Mrs. Falchion stepped on the deck. As I delivered Miss Treherne into the hands of her father, who was anxiously awaiting us, Hungerford said in my ear: "A tragedy queen,

Marmion." He said it so distinctly that Mrs. Falchion heard it, and she gave him a searching look. Their eyes met and warred for a moment, and then he added: "I remember! Yes, I can respect the bravery of a woman whom I do not like."

"And this is to-morrow," she said, "and a man may change his mind, and that may be fate—or a woman's whim." She bowed, turned away, and went below, evidently disliking the reception she had had, and anxious to escape inquiries and congratulations. Nor did she appear again until the 'Fulvia' got under way about six o'clock in the evening. As we moved out of the harbour we passed close to the 'Porcupine' and saw its officers grouped on the deck, waving adieus to some one on our deck, whom I guessed, of course, to be Galt Roscoe.

At this time Mrs. Falchion was standing near me. "For whom is that demonstration?" she said.

"For one of her officers, who is a passenger by the 'Fulvia'," I replied. "You remember we passed the 'Porcupine' in the Indian Ocean?"

"Yes, I know that very well," she said, with a shade of meaning. "But"—here I thought her voice had a touch of breathlessness—"but who is the officer? I mean, what is his name?"

"He stands in the group near the door of the captain's cabin, there. His name is Galt Roscoe, I think."

A slight exclamation escaped her. There was a chilly smile on her lips, and her eyes sought the group until it rested on Galt Roscoe. In a moment she said "You have met him?"

"In the cemetery this morning, for the first time."

"Everybody seems to have had business this morning at the cemetery. Justine Caron spent hours there. To me it is so foolish, heaping up a mound, and erecting a tombstone over—what?—a dead thing, which, if one could see it, would be dreadful."

"You would prefer complete absorption—as of the ocean?" I brutally retorted.

She appeared not to notice the innuendo. "Yes, what is gone is gone. Graves are idolatry. Gravestones are ghostly. It is people without imagination who need these things, together with crape and black-edged paper. It is all barbaric ritual. I know you think I am callous, but I cannot help that. For myself, I wish the earth close about me, and level green grass above me, and no one knowing of the place; or else, fire or the sea."

"Mrs. Falchion," said I, "between us there need be no delicate words. You appear to have neither imagination, nor idolatry, nor remembrances, nor common womanly kindness."

"Indeed!" she said. "Yet you might know me better." Here she touched my arm with the tips of her fingers, and, in spite of myself, I felt my pulse beat faster. It seemed to me that in her presence, even now, I could not quite trust myself. "Indeed!" she repeated. "And who made you omniscient, Dr. Marmion? You hardly do yourself justice. You hold a secret. You insist on reminding me of the fact. Is that in perfect gallantry? Do you know me altogether, from your knowledge of that one thing? You are vain. Or does the secret wear on you, and—Mr. Hungerford? Was it necessary to seek HIS help in keeping it?"

I told her then the true history of Hungerford's connection with Boyd Madras, and also begged her pardon for showing just now my knowledge of her secret. At this she said, "I suppose I should be grateful," and was there a slightly softer cadence to her voice?

"No, you need not be grateful," I said. "We are silent, first, because he wished it; then because you are a woman."

"You define your reasons with astonishing care and taste," she replied.

"Oh, as to taste!—" said I; but then I bit my tongue.

At that she said, her lips very firm and pale, "I could not pretend to a grief I did not feel. I acted no lie. He died as we had lived—estranged. I put up no memorials."

But I, thinking of my mother lying in her grave, a woman after God's own heart, who loved me more than I deserved, repeated almost unconsciously these lines (clipped from a magazine):

"Sacred the ring, the faded glove,
Once worn by one we used to love;
Dead warriors in their armour live,
And in their relics saints survive.

"Oh, Mother Earth, henceforth defend
All thou hast garnered of my friend,
From winter's wind and driving sleet,
From summer's sun and scorching heat.

"Within thine all-embracing breast
Is hid one more forsaken nest;
While, in the sky, with folded wings,
The bird that left it sits and sings."

I paused; the occasion seemed so little suited to the sentiment, for around us was the idle excitement of leaving port. I was annoyed with myself for my share in the conversation so far. Mrs. Falchion's eyes had scarcely left that group around the captain's door, although she had appeared acutely interested in what I was saying. Now she said:

"You recite very well. I feel impressed, but I fancy it is more your voice than those fine sentiments; for, after all, you cannot glorify the dead body. Look at the mummy of Thothmes at Boulak, and think what Cleopatra must look like now. And please let us talk about something else. Let us—" She paused.

I followed the keen, shaded glance of her eyes, and saw, coming from the group by the captain's door, Galt Roscoe. He moved in our direction. Suddenly he paused. His look was fixed upon Mrs. Falchion. A flush passed over his face, not exactly confusing, but painful, and again it left him pale, and for a moment he stood motionless. Then he came forward to us. He bowed to me, then looked hard at her. She held out her hand.

"Mr. Roscoe, I think?" she said. "An old friend," she added, turning to me. He gravely took her extended hand and said:

"I did not think to see you here, Miss—"

"MRS. Falchion," she interrupted clearly.

"MRS. Falchion!" he said, with surprise. "It is so many years since we had met, and—"

"And it is so easy to forget things? But it isn't so many, really—only seven, the cycle for constitutional renewal. Dear me, how erudite that sounds! . . . So, I suppose, we meet the same, yet not the same."

"The same, yet not the same," he repeated after her, with an attempt at lightness, yet abstractedly.

"I think you gentlemen know each other?" she said.

"Yes; we met in the cemetery this morning. I was visiting the grave of a young French officer."

"I know," she said—"Justine Caron's brother. She has told me; but she did not tell me your name."

"She has told you?" he said.

"Yes. She is—my companion." I saw that she did not use the word that first came to her.

"How strangely things occur! And yet," he added musingly, "I suppose, after all, coincidence is not so strange in these days of much travel, particularly with people whose lives are connected—more or less."

"Whose lives are connected—more or less," she repeated after him, in a steely tone.

It seemed to me that I had received my cue to leave. I bowed myself away, and went about my duties. As we steamed bravely through the Straits of Babelmandeb, with Perim on our left, rising lovely through the milky haze, I came on deck again, and they were still near where I had left them an hour before. I passed, glancing at them as I did so. They did not look towards me. His eyes were turned to the shore, and hers were fixed on him. I saw an expression on her lips that gave her face new character. She was speaking, as I thought, clearly and mercilessly. I could not help hearing her words as I passed them.

"You are going to be that—you!" There was a ring of irony in her tone. I heard nothing more in words, but I saw him turn to her somewhat sharply, and I caught the deep notes of his voice as he answered her. When, a moment after, I looked back, she had gone below.

Galt Roscoe had a seat at Captain Ascott's table, and I did not see anything of him at meal-times, but

elsewhere I soon saw him a great deal. He appeared to seek my company. I was glad of this, for I found that he was an agreeable man, and had distinct originality of ideas, besides being possessed of very considerable culture. He also had that social aplomb so much a characteristic of the naval officer. Yet, man of the world as he was, he had a strain of asceticism which puzzled me. It did not make him eccentric, but it was not a thing usual with the naval man. Again, he wished to be known simply as Mr. Roscoe, not as Captain Roscoe, which was his rank. He said nothing about having retired, yet I guessed he had done so. One evening, however, soon after we had left Aden, we were sitting in my cabin, and the conversation turned upon a recent novel dealing with the defection of a clergyman of the Church of England through agnosticism. The keenness with which he threw himself into the discussion and the knowledge he showed, surprised me. I knew (as most medical students get to know, until they know better) some scientific objections to Christianity, and I put them forward. He clearly and powerfully met them. I said at last, laughingly: "Why, you ought to take holy orders."

"That is what I am going to do," he said very seriously, "when I get to England. I am resigning the navy." At that instant there flashed through my mind Mrs. Falchion's words: "You are going to be that—you!"

Then he explained to me that he had been studying for two years, and expected to go up for deacon's orders soon after his return to England. I cannot say that I was greatly surprised, for I had known a few, and had heard of many, men who had exchanged the navy for the Church. It struck me, however, that Galt Roscoe appeared to view the matter from a standpoint not professional; the more so, that he expressed his determination to go to the newest part of a new country, to do the pioneer work of the Church. I asked him where he was going, and he said to the Rocky Mountains of Canada. I told him that my destination was Canada also. He warmly expressed the hope that we should see something of each other there. This friendship of ours may seem to have been hastily hatched, but it must be remembered that the sea is a great breeder of friendship. Two men who have known each other for twenty years find that twenty days at sea bring them nearer than ever they were before, or else estrange them.

It was on this evening that, in a lull of the conversation, I casually asked him when he had known Mrs. Falchion. His face was inscrutable, but he said somewhat hurriedly, "In the South Sea Islands," and then changed the subject. So, there was some mystery again? Was this woman never to be dissociated from enigma? In those days I never could think of her save in connection with some fatal incident in which she was scathless, and some one else suffered.

It may have been fancy, but I thought that, during the first day or two after leaving Aden, Galt Roscoe and Mrs. Falchion were very little together. Then the impression grew that this was his doing, and again that she waited with confident patience for the time when he would seek her—because he could not help himself. Often when other men were paying her devoted court I caught her eyes turned in his direction, and I thought I read in her smile a consciousness of power. And it so was. Very soon he was at her side. But I also noticed that he began to look worn, that his conversation with me lagged. I think that at this time I was so much occupied with tracing personal appearances to personal influences that I lost to some degree the physician's practical keenness. My eyes were to be opened. He appeared to be suffering, and she seemed to unbend to him more than she ever unbent to me, or any one else on board. Hungerford, seeing this, said to me one day in his blunt way: "Marmion, old Ulysses knew what he was about when he tied himself to the mast."

But the routine of the ship went on as before. Fortunately, Mrs. Falchion's heroism at Aden had taken the place of the sensation attending Boyd Madras's suicide. Those who tired of thinking of both became mildly interested in Red Sea history. Chief among these was the bookmaker. As an historian the bookmaker was original. He cavalierly waved aside all such confusing things as dates: made Moses and Mahomet contemporaneous, incidentally referred to King Solomon's visits to Cleopatra, and with sad irreverence spoke of the Exodus and the destruction of Pharaoh's horses and chariots as "the big handicap." He did not mean to be irreverent or unhistorical. He merely wished to enlighten Mrs. Callendar, who said he was very original, and quite clever at history. His really startling points, however, were his remarks upon the colours of the mountains of Egypt and the sunset tints to be seen on the Red Sea and the Suez Canal. To him the grey, and pink, and melancholy gold only brought up visions of a race at Epsom or Flemington—generally Flemington, where the staring Australian sun pours down on an emerald course, on a score of horses straining upon the start, the colours of the jockeys' coats and caps changing in the struggle like a kaleidoscope, and making strange harmonies of colour. The comparison between the mountains of Egypt and a race-course might seem most absurd, if one did not remember that the bookmaker had his own standards, and that he thought he was paying unusual honour to the land of the Fellaah. Clovelly plaintively said, as he drank his hock and seltzer, that the bookmaker was hourly saving his life; and Colonel Ryder admitted at last that Kentucky never produced anything quite like him.

The evening before we came to the Suez Canal I was walking with Miss Treherne and her father. I

had seen Galt Roscoe in conversation with Mrs. Falchion. Presently I saw him rise to go away. A moment after, in passing, I was near her. She sprang up, caught my arm, and pointed anxiously. I looked, and saw Galt Roscoe swaying as he walked.

"He is ill—ill," she said.

I ran forward and caught him as he was falling. Ill?

Of course he was ill. What a fool I had been! Five minutes with him assured me that he had fever. I had set his haggard appearance down to some mental trouble—and I was going to be a professor in a medical college!

Yet I know now that a troubled mind hastened the fever.

CHAPTER X

BETWEEN DAY AND DARK

From the beginning Galt Roscoe's fever was violent. It had been hanging about him for a long time, and was the result of malarial poisoning. I devoutly wished that we were in the Mediterranean instead of the Red Sea, where the heat was so great; but fortunately we should soon be there. There was no other case of sickness on board, and I could devote plenty of time to him. Offers of assistance in nursing were numerous, but I only encouraged those of the bookmaker, strange as this may seem; yet he was as gentle and considerate as a woman in the sick-room. This was on the first evening of his attack. After that I had reasons for dispensing with his generous services. The night after Roscoe was taken ill we were passing through the canal, the search-light of the 'Fulvia' sweeping the path ahead of it and glorifying everything it touched. Mud barges were fairy palaces; Arab punts beautiful gondolas; the ragged Egyptians on the banks became picturesque; and the desolate country behind them had a wide vestibule of splendour. I stood for half an hour watching this scene, then I went below to Roscoe's cabin and relieved the bookmaker. The sick man was sleeping from the effects of a sedative draught. The bookmaker had scarcely gone when I heard a step behind me, and I turned and saw Justine Caron standing timidly at the door, her eyes upon the sleeper. She spoke quietly. "Is he very ill?"

I answered that he was, but also that for some days I could not tell how dangerous his illness might be. She went to the berth where he lay, the reflected light from without playing weirdly on his face, and smoothed the pillow gently.

"If you are willing, I will watch for a time," she said. "Everybody is on deck. Madame said she would not need me for a couple of hours. I will send a steward for you if he wakes; you need rest yourself."

That I needed rest was quite true, for I had been up all the night before; still I hesitated. She saw my hesitation, and added:

"It is not much that I can do, still I should like to do it. I can at least watch." Then, very earnestly: "He watched beside Hector."

I left her with him, her fingers moving the small bag of ice about his forehead to allay the fever and her eyes patiently regarding him. I went on deck again. I met Miss Treherne and her father. They both inquired for the sick man, and I told Belle—for she seemed much interested—the nature of such malarial fevers, the acute forms they sometimes take, and the kind of treatment required. She asked several questions, showing a keen understanding of my explanations, and then, after a moment's silence, said meditatively: "I think I like men better when they are doing responsible work; it is difficult to be idle—and important too."

I saw very well that, with her, I should have to contend for a long time against those first few weeks of dalliance on the 'Fulvia'.

Clovelly joined us, and for the first time—if I had not been so egotistical it had appeared to me before—I guessed that his somewhat professional interest in Belle Treherne had developed into a very personal thing. And with that thought came also the conception of what a powerful antagonist he would be. For it improves some men to wear glasses; and Clovelly had a delightful, wheedling tongue. It was allusive, contradictory (a thing pleasing to women), respectful yet playful, bold yet reverential. Many a time I have longed for Clovelly's tongue. Unfortunately for me, I learned some of his methods without

his art; and of this I am occasionally reminded at this day. A man like Clovelly is dangerous as a rival when he is not in earnest; when he IS in earnest, it becomes a lonely time for the other man—unless the girl is perverse.

I left the two together, and moved about the deck, trying to think closely about Roscoe's case, and to drive Clovelly's invasion from my mind. I succeeded, and was only roused by Mrs. Falchion's voice beside me.

"Does he suffer much?" she murmured.

When answered, she asked nervously how he looked—it was impossible that she should consider misery without shrinking. I told her that he was only flushed and haggard as yet and that he was little wasted. A thought flashed to her face. She was about to speak, but paused. After a moment, however, she remarked evenly: "He is likely to be delirious?"

"It is probable," I replied.

Her eyes were fixed on the search-light. The look in them was inscrutable. She continued quietly: "I will go and see him, if you will let me. Justine will go with me."

"Not now," I replied. "He is sleeping. To-morrow, if you will."

I did not think it necessary to tell her that Justine was at that moment watching beside him. We walked the deck together in silence.

"I wonder," she said, "that you care to walk with me. Please do not make the matter a burden."

She did not say this with any invitation to courteous protest on my part, but rather with a cold frankness—for which, I confess, I always admired her. I said now: "Mrs. Falchion, you have suggested what might easily be possible in the circumstances, but I candidly admit that I have never yet found your presence disagreeable; and I suppose that is a comment upon my weakness. Though, to speak again with absolute truth, I think I do not like you at this present."

"Yes, I fancy I can understand that," she said. "I can understand how, for instance, one might feel a just and great resentment, and have in one's hand the instrument of punishment, and yet withhold one's hand and protect where one should injure."

At this moment these words had no particular significance to me, but there chanced a time when they came home with great force. I think, indeed, that she was speaking more to herself than to me. Suddenly she turned to me.

"I wonder," she said, "if I am as cruel as you think me—for, indeed, I do not know. But I have been through many things."

Here her eyes grew cold and hard. The words that followed seemed in no sequence. "Yet," she said, "I will go and see him to-morrow. . . . Good-night." After about an hour I went below to Galt Roscoe's cabin. I drew aside the curtain quietly. Justine Caron evidently had not heard me. She was sitting beside the sick man, her fingers still smoothing away the pillow from his fevered face and her eyes fixed on him. I spoke to her. She rose. "He has slept well," she said. And she moved to the door.

"Miss Caron," I said, "if Mrs. Falchion is willing, you could help me to nurse Mr. Roscoe?"

A light sprang to her eyes. "Indeed, yes," she said.

"I will speak to her about it, if you will let me?" She bowed her head, and her look was eloquent of thanks. After a word of good-night we parted.

I knew that nothing better could occur to my patient than that Justine Caron should help to nurse him. This would do far more for him than medicine—the tender care of a woman—than many pharmacopoeias.

Hungerford had insisted on relieving me for a couple of hours at midnight. He said it would be a good preparation for going on the bridge at three o'clock in the morning. About half-past two he came to my cabin and waked me, saying: "He is worse—delirious; you had better come."

He was indeed delirious. Hungerford laid his hand on my shoulder. "Marmion," he said, "that woman is in it. Like the devil, she is ubiquitous. Mr. Roscoe's past is mixed up with hers somehow. I don't suppose men talk absolute history in delirium, but there is no reason, I fancy, why they shouldn't paraphrase. I should reduce the number of nurses to a minimum if I were you."

A determined fierceness possessed me at the moment. I said to him: "She shall nurse him, Hungerford—she, and Justine Caron, and myself."

"Plus Dick Hungerford," he added. "I don't know quite how you intend to work this thing, but you have the case in your hands, and what you've told me about the French girl shows that she is to be trusted. But as for myself, Marmion M.D., I'm sick—sick—sick of this woman, and all her words and works. I believe that she has brought bad luck to this ship; and it's my last voyage on it; and—and I begin to think you're a damned good fellow—excuse the insolence of it; and—good-night."

For the rest of the night I listened to Galt Roscoe's wild words. He tossed from side to side, and murmured brokenly. Taken separately, and as they were spoken, his words might not be very significant, but pieced together, arranged, and interpreted through even scant knowledge of circumstances, they were sufficient to give me a key to difficulties which, afterwards, were to cause much distress. I arrange some of the sentences here to show how startling were the fancies—or remembrances—that vexed him.

"But I was coming back—I was coming back—I tell you I should have stayed with her for ever. . . . See how she trembles!—Now her breath is gone—There is no pulse—Her heart is still—My God, her heart is still!—Hush! cover her face. . . . Row hard, you devils!—A hundred dollars if you make the point in time. . . . Whereaway?—Whereaway?—Steady now!—Let them have it across the bows!—Low! low!—fire low! . . . She is dead—she is dead!"

These things he would say over and over again breathlessly, then he would rest a while, and the trouble would begin again. "It was not I that did it—no, it was not I. She did it herself!—She plunged it in, deep, deep, deep! You made me a devil! . . . Hush! I WILL tell!—I know you—yet—Mercy—Mercy—Falchion—"

Yes, it was best that few should enter his cabin. The ravings of a sick man are not always counted ravings, no more than the words of a well man are always reckoned sane. At last I got him into a sound sleep, and by that time I was thoroughly tired out. I called my own steward, and asked him to watch for a couple of hours while I rested. I threw myself down and slept soundly for an hour beyond that time, the steward having hesitated to wake me.

By that time we had passed into the fresher air of the Mediterranean, and the sea was delightfully smooth. Galt Roscoe still slept, though his temperature was high.

My conference with Mrs. Falchion after breakfast was brief, but satisfactory. I told her frankly that Roscoe had been delirious, that he had mentioned her name, and that I thought it best to reduce the number of nurses and watchers. I made my proposition about Justine Caron. She shook her head a little impatiently, and said that Justine had told her, and that she was quite willing. Then I asked her if she would not also assist. She answered immediately that she wished to do so. As if to make me understand why she did it, she added: "If I did not hear the wild things he says, some one else would; and the difference is that I understand them, and the some one else would interpret them with the genius of the writer of a fairy book."

And so it happened that Mrs. Falchion came to sit many hours a day beside the sick couch of Galt Roscoe, moistening his lips, cooling his brow, giving him his medicine. After the first day, when she was, I thought, alternating between innate disgust of misery and her womanliness and humanity,—in these days more a reality to me,—she grew watchful and silently solicitous at every turn of the malady. What impressed me most was that she was interested and engrossed more, it seemed, in the malady than in the man himself.

And yet she baffled me even when I had come to this conclusion.

During most of his delirium she remained almost impassive, as if she had schooled herself to be calm and strong in nerve; but one afternoon she did a thing that upset all my opinions of her for a moment. Looking straight at her with staring, unconscious eyes, he half rose in his bed, and said in a low, bitter tone: "I hate you. I once loved you—but I hate you now!" Then he laughed scornfully, and fell back on the pillow. She had been sitting very quietly, musing. His action had been unexpected, and had broken upon a silence. She rose to her feet quickly, gave a sharp indrawn breath, and pressed her hand against her side, as though a sudden pain had seized her. The next moment, however, she was composed again, and said in explanation that she had been half asleep, and he had startled her. But I had seen her under what seemed to me more trying conditions, and she had not shown any nervousness such as this.

The passengers, of course, talked. Many "true histories" of Mrs. Falchion's devotion to the sick man were abroad; but it must be said, however, that all of them were romantically creditable to her. She had become a rare product even in the eyes of Miss Treherne, and more particularly her father, since the

matter at the Tanks. Justine Caron was slyly besieged by the curious, but they went away empty; for Justine, if very simple and single-minded, was yet too much concerned for both Galt Roscoe and Mrs. Falchion to give the inquiring the slightest clue. She knew, indeed, little herself, whatever she may have guessed. As for Hungerford, he was dumb. He refused to consider the matter. But he roundly maintained once or twice, without any apparent relevance, that a woman was like a repeating decimal—you could follow her, but you never could reach her. He usually added to this: "Minus one, Marmion," meaning thus to exclude the girl who preferred him to any one else. When I ventured to suggest that Miss Treherne might also be excepted, he said, with maddening suggestion: "She lets Mrs. Falchion fool her, doesn't she? And she isn't quite sure the splendour of a medical professor's position is superior to that of an author."

In these moments, although I tried to smile on him, I hated him a little. I sought to revenge myself on him by telling him to help himself to a cigar, having first placed the box of Mexicans near him. He invariably declined them, and said he would take one of the others from the tea-box—my very best, kept in tea for sake of dryness. If I reversed the process he reversed his action. His instinct regarding cigars was supernatural, and I almost believe that he had—like the Black Dwarf's cat—the "poo'er" of reading character and interpreting events—an uncanny divination.

I knew by the time we reached Valetta that Roscoe would get well; but he recognised none of us until we arrived at Gibraltar. Justine Caron and myself had been watching beside him. As the bells clanged to "slow down" on entering the harbour, his eyes opened with a gaze of sanity and consciousness. He looked at me, then at Justine.

"I have been ill?" he said.

Justine's eyes were not entirely to be trusted. She turned her head away.

"Yes, you have been very ill," I replied, "but you are better."

He smiled feebly, adding: "At least, I am grateful that I did not die at sea." Then he closed his eyes. After a moment he opened them, and said, looking at Justine: "You have helped to nurse me, have you not?" His wasted fingers moved over the counterpane towards her.

"I could do so little," she murmured.

"You have more than paid your debt to me," he gently replied. "For I live, you see, and poor Hector died."

She shook her head gravely, and rejoined: "Ah no, I can never pay the debt I owe to you and to God—now." He did not understand this, I know. But I did. "You must not talk any more," I said to him.

But Justine interposed. "He must be told that the nurse who has done most for him is Mrs. Falchion." His brows contracted as if he were trying to remember something. He moved his head wearily.

"Yes, I think I remember," he said, "about her being with me, but nothing clearly—nothing clearly. She is very kind."

Justine here murmured: "Shall I tell her?"

I was about to say no; but Roscoe nodded, and said quietly, "Yes, yes."

Then I made no objection, but urged that the meeting should only be for a moment. I determined not to leave them alone even for that moment. I did not know what things connected with their past—whatever it was—might be brought up, and I knew that entire freedom from excitement was necessary. I might have spared myself any anxiety on the point. When she came she was perfectly self-composed, and more as she seemed when I first knew her, though I will admit that I thought her face more possible to emotion than in the past.

It seems strange to write of a few weeks before as the past; but so much had occurred that the days might easily have been months and the weeks years.

She sat down beside him and held out her hand. And as she did so, I thought of Boyd Madras and of that long last night of his life, and of her refusal to say to him one comforting word, or to touch his hand in forgiveness and friendship. And was this man so much better than Boyd Madras? His wild words in delirium might mean nothing, but if they meant anything, and she knew of that anything, she was still a heartless, unnatural woman, as I had once called her.

Roscoe took her hand and held it briefly. "Dr. Marmion says that you have helped to nurse me through my illness," he whispered. "I am most grateful."

I thought she replied with the slightest constraint in her voice. "One could not let an old acquaintance die without making an effort to save him."

At that instant I grew scornful, and longed to tell him of her husband. But then a husband was not an acquaintance. I ventured instead: "I am sorry, but I must cut short all conversation for the present. When he is a little better, he will be benefited by your brightest gossip, Mrs. Falchion."

She rose smiling, but she did not again take his hand, though I thought he made a motion to that end. But she looked down at him steadily for a moment. Beneath her look his face flushed, and his eyes grew hot with light; then they dropped, and the eyelids closed on them. At that she said, with an incomprehensible airiness: "Good-night. I am going now to play the music of 'La Grande Duchesse' as a farewell to Gibraltar. They have a concert on to-night."

And she was gone.

At the mention of La Grande Duchesse he sighed, and turned his head away from her. What it all meant I did not know, and she had annoyed me as much as she had perplexed me; her moods were like the chameleon's colours. He lay silent for a long time, then he turned to me and said: "Do you remember that tale in the Bible about David and the well of Bethlehem?" I had to confess my ignorance.

"I think I can remember it," he continued. And though I urged him not to tax himself, he spoke slowly thus:

"And David was in an hold, and the garrison of the Philistines was then in Bethlehem.

"And David longed, and said, Oh that one would give me to drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem that is at the gate!

"And the three brake through the host of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem that was by the gate, and took and brought it to David; nevertheless, he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the Lord.

"And he said, My God forbid it me that I should do this; is not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives? Therefore he would not drink it."

He paused a moment, and then added: "One always buys back the past at a tremendous price. Resurrections give ghosts only."

"But you must sleep now," I urged. And then, because I knew not what else more fitting, I added: "Sleep, and

"Let the dead past bury its dead."

"Yes, I will sleep," he answered.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Aboriginal dispersion
And even envy praised her
Audience that patronisingly listens outside a room or window
But to pay the vulgar penalty of prison—ah!
Death is a magnificent ally; it untangles knots
Engrossed more, it seemed, in the malady than in the man
For a man having work to do, woman, lovely woman, is rocks
It is difficult to be idle—and important too
It is hard to be polite to cowards
Jews everywhere treated worse than the Chinaman
One always buys back the past at a tremendous price
One doesn't choose to worry
Saying uncomfortable things in a deferential way
Slow-footed hours wandered by, leaving apathy in their train
That anxious civility which beauty can inspire

The ravings of a sick man are not always counted ravings
The sea is a great breeder of friendship
The tender care of a woman—than many pharmacopoeias
Vanity; and from this much feminine hatred springs
Very severe on those who do not pretend to be good
What is gone is gone Graves are idolatry
Who get a morbid enjoyment out of misery

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MRS. FALCHION, VOLUME 1 ***

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