

THE  
DIAMOND SHIP



MAX PEMBERTON

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BY  
MAX PEMBERTON



CASELL AND COMPANY, LTD  
London, New York, Toronto and Melbourne  
1912

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**DIAMOND SHIP**

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*To*

THE REV. WILLIAM BAKER, D.D.  
(LATE HEADMASTER OF MERCHANT TAYLORS' SCHOOL),

THIS BOOK IS GRATEFULLY INSCRIBED

BY HIS OLD PUPIL.



*“He spake, and into every heart his words  
Carried new strength and courage.”*

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# THE DIAMOND SHIP.

## CHAPTER I.

THE PREFACE OF TIMOTHY McSHANUS, JOURNALIST.

It would have been at the Fancy Fair and Fête at Kensington Town Hall that my friend, Dr. Fabos, first met Miss Fordibras. Very well do I recollect that he paid the price of it for the honourable company of the Goldsmith Club.

“McShanus,” said he, “if there’s anyone knows his way to a good supper, ’tis yourself and no other. Lead forth to the masquerade, and I follow. Spare no expense, McShanus. Your friends are my friends. I would have this a memorable night—the last I may be in London for many a year.”

There were seven of us who took him at his word and got into the cab together. You must know that he had paid for a little dinner at the Goldsmith Club already, and never a man who did not justice to his handsome hospitality. The night was clear, and there were stars in the heavens. I mind me that a little of the *dulce* and the *desipere* moved us to sing “Rule, Britannia” as we went. ’Tis a poor heart that never rejoices; and Ean Fabos paid for it—as I took the opportunity to remark to my good friend Killock, the actor.

“Shall we pay for the cab?” says he.

“Would you insult the most generous heart in Great Britain this night?” says I.

“On reflection,” says he, “the man who does not pay will have no trouble about his change,” and with that we went into the hall. It is true that we were a remarkable company. My old comrade, Barry Henshaw, had come in a velvet shooting coat and a red neckcloth that was not to the taste of the officials at the box-office. Killock himself, the darling of the ladies, God bless him, had diamonds strewn upon his vest thick enough to make a pattern of chrysanthemums. My own cravat would have been no disgrace to the Emperor Napoleon. And there we stood, seven members of seven honourable professions, like soldiers at the drill, our backs to the wall of the dancing room and our eyes upon the refreshment buffet.

“’Tis time for a whisky and soda,” says Barry Henshaw, the famous dramatist, directly his coat was off his back.

“Shame on ye,” says I,—“you that were lapping the poison they call ‘kummel’ not the half of an hour ago. Beware of the drink, Barry—the secret habit.”

“Oh,” says he, “then you’re coming with me, I suppose?”

And then he remarked:

“If Fabos were a gentleman he would join the procession and pay for it. But that’s the worst of these shows. You always lose the man with the money.”

I passed the observation by as impertinent, and we went to the buffet. What they called the Fancy Fair was in full swing by this time; though devil a wig on the green for all their money. Slips of beauty dressed as shepherdesses mistook me and my friend for their sheep, and would have fleeced us prettily; but our lofty utterance, coming of a full heart and two shillings and tenpence in the purse, restrained their ardour, and sent them to the right-about. 'Twas a fair, be it told, for the sailor boys at Portsmouth; and when you had bought a bunch of daisies for ten shillings, of a maid with blue eyes and cherry lips, you could waltz with the same little vixen at five shillings a time. My friend Barry, I observed, turned very pale at this suggestion.

"Do you not lift the sprightly toe?" asked I.

"Man," he said, "it's worse than a Channel passage."

"But Fabos is dancing," said I, pointing to our host in the midst of the rabble. "See what comes of the plain living, my boy. He'll dance until the sun shines and think nothing of it. And a pretty enough five shillings' worth he has on his arm," I put in as an after-thought.

'Twas odd how we fell to discussing this same Dr. Ean Fabos upon every occasion that came to us. Was it because of his money—riches beyond dreams to poor devils who must please the public or die dishonoured in the market-place? I venture, no. We of the Goldsmith Club care for no man's money. Bid the Vanderbilts come among us, and we lift no hats. 'Tis true that in so far as they assist the mighty sons of Homer and Praxiteles to meet their just obligations upon quarter day, they have some use in the world. I have known circumstances when they have kept precious lives from the Underground Railway or the Round Pond in Kensington Gardens. But this is to betray the secrets of my club and of my poor friends Killock and Barry Henshaw and the rest.

What I was saying was that Ean Fabos's riches made no more mark upon us than a lady's parasol upon the back of a mule. They said he was a doctor of Cambridge, whose father had made a fortune out of Welsh coal and then joined his ancestors. My homage to his consideration, says I. May the warmth of his discovery glow in many hearts and long blaze in beneficent profusion up the chimneys of the Goldsmith Club! He has bequeathed us a noble son, whose dinners are second to none in the empire. Again I say, hats off. 'Twas a gentleman entirely.

But I speak of his son dancing with the little girl in red at the Fancy Fair at Kensington. Be sure that his six feet one would go bending to sixty-eight inches and whispering soft things in her ear at five shillings the waltz, as the programme told ye. And he such a silent man ordinarily—not to be moved from that rogue of a taciturn smile we see so often upon his face even when the wit of the club is worthy of the name we bear. They call Ean Fabos many names. Some say misogynist; others cynic; a few speak of his lacking heart; there are those who call him selfish. What's he to do with all his money? Do his friends share it? The sacred shrines of Bacchus know better. He buys diamonds, they say. Just that, great diamonds and rubies and sapphires, not for a woman's pretty arms or her white shoulders, you

must know; but to lock up in his safe at his great house down Newmarket way; to lock up and hide from men and gloat upon in the silence of the night. That's what the world says. I'd add to it that there's no true charity in all London which has not benefited secretly by his generous alms. But that is known to few, and was never known to me until I met the daughter of my friend Oscroft, the painter; left an orphan as she was in the same unkind city.

What is it, then, about Ean Fabos that turns all eyes upon him in whatever company he may be? Some, for sure, hope to borrow money of him. So much my great heart for humanity must admit. They hope to borrow money from him and to save him from others who would do likewise. 'Tis their way of friendship. But, mark ye, there are many more, strangers to him, enemies because of the favour he enjoys, and these are on their knees with the rest. What is it, then? I'll tell you in a word. 'Tis that great power of what they call personal magnetism, a power that we can give no right name to, but must admit whenever we find it. Ean Fabos has it beyond any man I have known. Let him say three words at a table, and the whole room is listening. Let him hold his tongue and the people are looking at him. You cannot pass it by. It grips you with both hands, draws you forward, compels you to give best. And that's why men gather about my friend Dr. Ean Fabos, as they would about the fine gentlemen of old Greece could they come back to this London of ours. They have no will of their own while he is among them.

Now, this is the very man whom I saw dancing twice (at five shillings a time, though naturally the money would be nothing to him, while much to poor souls who have had their pictures flung into the mud by the sorry Sassenachs who sit at Burlington House), dancing twice, I say, with a black-haired shepherdess in a red cloak; not one that I myself, who have a fine eye for the sex, would have been lavishing my immortal wit upon; but just a merry bit of laughing goods that you can sample in any ball-room. When he surrendered her to her father, a stately old gentleman, stiff as a poker in the back, and one who reminded me of my dead friend General von Moltke, of Prussia—when he did this, I say, and I asked him who she might be, he answered me with the frankness of a boy:

“Timothy McShanus,” says he, “she's the daughter of General Fordibras, whose ancestor went to America with the Marquis de Lafayette. That is the beginning and end of my knowledge. Lead me forth to the cellar, for I would quench my thirst. Not since I was the stroke of the great Leander boat at Henley did there drop from my brow such honest beads of sweat. Man alive, I would not go through it again for the crown ruby of Jetsapore.”

“Your friend Lafayette was known to my grandfather,” says I, leading him straight to the buffet, “though I do not remember to have met him. As for the labour that ye speak of, I would ask you why you do it if ye have no stomach for it. To dance or not to dance—shall that be the question? Not for such men as we, Dr. Fabos; not for those who dwell upon the Olympian heights and would fly higher if ye could oblige them with the loan——”

He cut me very short, mistaking my words. Not a man who is given to what is

called dramatic gesture, I was much astonished when he took me by the arm and, leading me away to a corner, made the strangest confession that ever fell from such a man's lips.

"I danced with her, McShanus," said he, "because she is wearing the bronze pearls that were stolen from my flat in Paris just three years ago."

Be sure that I looked hard enough at him.

"Is there but one bronze pearl in the world?" I asked him after a while of surprise.

He turned upon me that weary smile which intellect may turn upon curiosity sometimes, and rejoined as one who pitied me.

"There are just ten of that particular shape, McShanus," says he, "and she is wearing four of them in the pendant she has upon her neck. The heart of it is a rose diamond, which once belonged to Princess Marguerite of Austria. There is a sweet little white sapphire in the ring she wears that I fancy I remember somewhere, though the truth of it has gone out of my head. If she will give me another dance by-and-by I will tell you more perhaps. But do not speculate upon my actions any further. You have known me long enough to say that waltzing is not an employment which usually occupies my attention."

"'Tis true as all the gospels," cried I; "and yet, what a story to hear! Would you have me think that yon bit of a girl is a thief?"

"Oh," says he, his clear blue eyes full upon me, "does an Irishman ever give himself time to think? Come, McShanus, use your wits. If she or her father knew that the jewels were stolen, would she be wearing them in a ball-room in London?"

"Why, no, she certainly would not."

"Wrong every time, Timothy McShanus. She would wear them for mere bravado. That's what I've been telling myself while I danced with her. If she does not know the truth, her father does."

"What! The military looking gentleman who so closely resembles my friend General von Moltke?"

"No other at all. I have my doubts about him. He knows that his daughter is wearing stolen jewels, but he has not the smallest idea that I know—either that, or he is clever enough to play Hamlet in a tam-o'-shanter. Excuse my unwonted agitation, McShanus. This is really very interesting."

I could see that he found it so. In all the years I have known him, never have I seen Ean Fabos so much put about or so little anxious to escape from his own thoughts. Fine figure of a man that he was, with great square shoulders hammered out in the rowing boats, a very Saxon all over him with a curly brown wig and a clean-shaven chin and boy's eyes and a man's heart—that was the body corporate of Ean Fabos. His mind not a man among us had ever read. I would have named him yesterday the most careless banker of his riches and money in the three kingdoms of Ireland, Wales, and England. And here I found him, set thinking like a philosopher, because he had stumbled across a few paltry pearls stolen from his cabinet. Should I alter my opinion of him for that? Devil a bit. 'Twas the girl of whom he thought, I

could see.

So here was Timothy McShanus deserting the baked meats, to say nothing of his convenient corner in the buffet, to go out and stare at a red shepherdess with picture books and maizypop to sell. And what kind of a colleen was it that he saw? Why, nothing out of the ordinary when viewed from afar. But come a little closer, and you shall see the blackest and the wickedest pair of eyes that ever looked out from the face of Venus. 'Tis no common man I am in my judgment of the sex; but this I will say, that when the girl looked at me, she found me as red in the face as a soldier at a court-martial. Not tall above the common; her hair a deep chestnut, running almost to black; her mouth just a rosebud between two pretty cheeks; there was something of France and something of America helping each other to make a wonder of her. Young as she was—and I supposed her to be about eighteen—her figure would have given her five years more according to our northern ideas; but I, who know Europe as I know Pall Mall, said no—she is eighteen, McShanus, my boy, and America has kept that peach-blossom upon her cheeks. Had I been mistaken, her voice would have corrected me. 'Twas a young girl's voice when she spoke, clear and musical as the song of silver bells.

"Now won't you buy a novel?" she said, bustling up to me just like a bunch of roses. "Here's Sir Arthur Hall Rider's very latest—an autograph copy for one guinea."

"Me dear," says I, "'tis Timothy McShanus who reads his own novels. Speak not of his poor rivals."

"Why, how clever of you!" says she, looking at me curiously. "And, of course, your books are the best. Why didn't you send me some to sell on my stall?"

"Bedad, and they're out of print, every won av them," says I, speaking the Sassenach's tongue to her as it should be spoken. "Here's the Archbishop and the Lord Chancellor together lamentin' it. 'Timothy,' says his lordship, 'the great masters are dead, Timothy. Be up and doing, or we are lost entirely.' The riches of America could not buy one of my novels—unless it were that ye found one av them upon an old bookstall at fourpence."

She didn't know what to make of me.

"How strange that I don't know your name!" says she, perplexed. "Did they review your novels in the newspapers?"

"My dear," says I, "the newspaper reviewers couldn't understand 'em. Be kind to them for it. Ye can't make a silk purse out a sow's ear any more than ye can make black pearls out of lollypops. Could it be, Timothy McShanus would be driving his own motor-car and not rejuiced to the back seat of the omnibus. 'Tis a strange world with more wrong than right in it."

"You like my pearls, then?" she asked.

I said they were almost worthy of her wearing them.

"Papa bought them in Paris," she ran on, as natural as could be. "They're not black, you know, but bronze. I don't care a bit about them myself—I like things that sparkle."

“Like your eyes,” cried I, searching for the truth in them. For sure, I could have laughed aloud just now at my friend Fabos’s tale of her. “Like your eyes when you were dancing a while back with a doctor of my acquaintance.”

She flushed a hair’s-breadth, and turned her head away.

“Oh, Dr. Fabos? Do you know him, then?”

“We have been as brothers for a matter of ten short years.”

“Is he killing people in London, did you say?”

“No such honourable employment. He’s just a fine, honest, independent gentleman. Ye’ve nothing much richer in America, maybe. The man who says a word against him has got to answer Timothy McShanus. Let him make his peace with heaven before he does so.”

She turned an arch gaze upon me, half-laughing at my words.

“I believe he sent you here to say so,” cries she.

“Indeed, an’ he did,” says I. “He’s anxious for your good opinion.”

“Why, what should I know of him?” says she, and then, turning to stare after him, she cried, “There he is, talking to my father. I’m sure he knows we’re picking him to pieces.”

“Pearls every one,” says I.

“Oh, dad is calling me,” she exclaimed, breaking away upon the words and showing me as pretty an ankle, when she turned, as I am likely to behold out of Dublin. A minute afterwards, what should I see but the General and her walking off with my friend Fabos just as if they had known him all their lives.

“And may the great god Bacchus, to say nothing of the little divinities who preside over the baked meats, may they forgive him!” I cried to Barry Henshaw and the rest of the seven. “He has gone without leaving us the money for our supper, and ’tis two and tenpence halfpenny that stands for all the capital I have in this mortal world.”

We shook our heads in true sorrow, and buttoned our coats about us. In thirst we came, in thirst must we return.

“And for a bit of a colleen that I could put in my pocket,” says I, as we tramped from the hall.

But what the others said I will make no mention of, being a respecter of persons and of the King’s English—God bless him!

## CHAPTER II.

### IN WHICH HARRIET FABOS TELLS OF HER BROTHER'S RETURN TO DEEPDENE HALL IN SUFFOLK.

I have been asked to write very shortly what I know of General Fordibras and of my brother's mysterious departures from England in the summer of the year 1904. God grant that all is well with him, and that these lines will be read by no others than the good friends who have not forgotten me in my affliction!

It was, I think, in the December of the previous year that he first met the General in London, as I understood from him, at a fashionable bazaar at Kensington. This circumstance he related to me upon his return; and a sister's interest in Joan Fordibras could not be but a growing one. I recollect that the General drove over one day in the spring from Newmarket and took luncheon with us. He is a fine, stately man, with a marked American accent, and a manner which clearly indicates his French birth. The daughter I thought a pretty winsome child; very full of quaint sayings and ideas, and so unlike our English girls. Ean had spoken of her so often that I was not prepared for the somewhat distant manner in which he treated her. Perhaps, in my heart, I found myself a little relieved. It has always been a sorrow to me to think that one I had loved so well as brother Ean might some day find my affection for him insufficient.

General Fordibras, it appears, makes a hobby of yachting. He lives but little in America, I understand, but much in Paris and the South. Ean used to be very fond of the sea, but he has given it up so many years that I was surprised to hear how much a sailor he can be. His own pet things—the laboratory, the observatory in our grounds, his rare books, above all, his rare jewels—were but spoken of indifferently. General Fordibras is very little interested in them; while his daughter is sufficiently an American to care chiefly for our antiquities—of which I was able to show her many at Deepdene. When they left us, it was to return to London, I understood; and then to join the General's yacht at Cherbourg.

Ean spoke little to me of these people when they were gone. I felt quite happy that he made no mention of the daughter, Joan. Very foreign to his usual habits, however, he was constantly to and fro between our house and London; and I observed, not without some uneasiness, that he had become a little nervous. This was the more remarkable because he has always been singularly fearless and brave, and ready to risk his own life for others upon the humblest call. At first I thought that he must be out of health, and would have had Dr. Wilcox over to see him; but he always resents my attempts to coddle him (as he calls it), and so I forbore, and tried to find another reason.

There is no one quicker than a sister who loves to detect those ailments of the

heart from which no man is free; but I had become convinced by this time that Ean cared nothing for Joan Fordibras, and that her absence abroad was not the cause of his disquietude. Of other reasons, I could name none that might be credibly received. Certainly, money troubles were out of the question, for I know that Ean is very rich. We had at Deepdene none of those petty parochial jealousies which are the cause of conflict in certain quarters. Our lives were quiet, earnest, and simple. What, then, had come to my brother? Happy indeed had I been if I could have answered that question.

The first thing that I noticed was his hesitation to leave me alone at the Manor. For the first time for some years, he declined to attend the annual dinner of his favourite club, the Potters.

“I should not be able to catch the last train down,” he said one morning at breakfast; “impossible, Harriet. I must not go.”

“Why, whatever has come to you, Ean?” said I. “Are you getting anxious about poor old me? My dear boy, just think how often I have been alone here.”

“Yes, but I don’t intend to leave you so much in future. When the reasons make themselves known to me, they shall be known to you, Harriet. Meanwhile, I am going to live at home. The little Jap stops with me. He is coming down from town to-day, so I hope you will make arrangements for him.”

He spoke of his Japanese servant Okyada, whom he brought from Tokio with him three years ago. The little fellow had served him most faithfully at his chambers in the Albany, and I was not displeased to have him down in Suffolk. Ean’s words, however, troubled me greatly, for I imagined that some danger threatened him in London, and a sister’s heart was beating already to discover it.

“Cannot you tell me something, Ean?”

He laughed boyishly, in a way that should have reassured me.

“I will tell you something, Harriet. Do you remember the bronze pearls that were stolen from my flat in Paris more than three years ago?”

“Of course, Ean; I remember them perfectly. How should I forget them? You don’t mean to say——”

“That I have recovered them? No—not quite. But I know where they are.”

“Then you will recover them, Ean?”

“Ah, that is for to-morrow. Let Okyada, by the way, have the room next to my dressing-room. He won’t interfere with my clothes, Harriet. You will still be able to coddle me as much as you please, and, of course, I will always warm the scissors before I cut my nails in winter.”

He was laughing at me again—a little unjustly, perhaps, as I have always believed that influenzas and rheums come to those who allow anything cold to touch the skin—but this is my old womanish fancy, while Ean is not altogether free himself from those amiable weaknesses and fads which take some part in all our lives. He, for instance, must have all his neckties of one colour in a certain drawer; some of his many clothes must go to the press upon one day and others upon the next. He buys great quantities of things from his hosier, and does not wear one half



of them. I am always scolding him for walking about the grounds at night in his dress clothes; but he never does so without first warming his cloth cap at the fire, if it be winter. I make mention of these trifles that others may understand how little there is of real weakness in a very lovable, manly, and courageous character. Beyond that, as the world knows well, Ean is one of the greatest linguists and most accomplished scholars in all Europe.

Now, had I been clever, I should have put two and two together and have foreseen that what Ean really feared was another attempt upon the wonderful collection of rare jewels he has made—a collection the existence of which is known to very few people, but is accounted among the most beautiful and rare in the country. Ean keeps his jewels—at least he kept them until recently—in a concealed safe in his own dressing-room, and very seldom was even I permitted to peep into that holy of holies. Here again some eccentricity of a lovable character is to be traced. My brother would as soon have thought of wearing a diamond in his shirt front as of painting his face like an Indian; but these hidden jewels he loved with a rare ardour, and I do truly believe that they had some share in his own scheme of life. When he lost the bronze pearls in Paris, I know that he fretted like a child for a broken toy. It was not their value—not at all. He called them his black angels—in jest, of course—and I think that he believed some of his own good luck went with them.

This was the state of things in the month of May when Okyada, the Japanese, came from London and took up his residence at the Manor. Ean told me nothing; he never referred again to the subject of his lost pearls. Much of his time was spent in his study, where he occupied himself with the book he was writing upon the legends of the Adriatic. His leisure he gave to his motor and his observatory.

I began to believe that whatever anxiety troubled him had passed; and in this belief I should have continued but for the alarming events of which I now write. And this brings me to the middle of the summer—to be exact, the fifteenth day of June in the year 1904.

## CHAPTER III.

### IN WHICH HARRIET FABOS CONTINUES HER NARRATIVE.

Ean, I remember, had come in from a little trip to Cambridge about five o'clock in the afternoon. We had tea together, and afterwards he called his servant, Okyada, to the study, and they were closeted there almost until dinner time. In the drawing-room later on, Ean proved to be in the brightest of spirits. He spoke, among other things, of some of his deserted hobbies, and expressed regret that he had given up his yacht.

"I'm getting old before my time, Harriet," he said. "The pantaloons and slippers stage is a tragedy for thirty-three. I think I shall get another boat, sister. If you are good, I will take you to the Adriatic again."

I promised to be very good; and then, laughing together, we chatted of the old days in Greece and Turkey, of our voyages to South America, and of sunny days in Spain. I had never seen him brighter. When we went to bed he kissed me twice, and then said such an extraordinary thing that I could not help but remember it:

"Okyada and I will be working late in the observatory," he said; "there may be one or two men about assisting us. Don't be afraid if you hear a noise, Harriet. You will know it's all right, and that I am aware of it."

Now, Ean is so very frank with me usually, looks me so straight in the face, and tells me so plainly what he means, that his evident attempt to conceal something from me upon this occasion, his averted gaze and forced manner, could not but awake my just curiosity. I did not press him at the moment, but in my own room I thought much upon it all, and was quite unable to sleep. Books were of no help to me, nor did my habitual self-composure help me. Recalling his words, and trying to fit a meaning to them, I went more than once to my window and looked out over the pleasure garden beneath it. Deepdene, as many know, is an old Tudor mansion with three sides of its ancient quadrangle still standing. My own rooms are in the right-hand wing; the pleasure garden is below them, and beyond its high wall is the open park which rims right down to the Bury road. Let me ask anyone what my feelings should have been, when chancing to look out over the garden at one o'clock that morning I saw, as plainly as my eyes have ever seen, the figures of three men crouching beneath the wall and evidently as fearful of discovery as I was of their presence.

My first impulse, naturally, was to wake Ean and to let him know what I had seen. No very courageous person at the best, I have always been greatly afraid of the presence of strange men about the house, and this visitation at such an hour would surely have alarmed the bravest. As if to magnify my fears, there was the light of our observatory shining brightly across the park to tell me plainly that my brother

was still at work, and that the invaluable Okyada must be with him. My maid, Humphreys, and the poor old butler, Williams, were my only janissaries, and what could one hope for from them in such an emergency? I began to say that if the men succeeded in entering the house, the peril were grave indeed; and then, upon this, I recollected Ean's warning, and tried to take comfort of it. Had he not said that there might be men about the house assisting him? Why, then, should I be afraid? I will tell you—because it came to me suddenly that he must have been aware of a probable attack upon the Manor, and had wished to prepare me for anything the night could bring forth. There was no other reasonable explanation.

Judge, then, in what a dilemma I found myself. My brother away at the observatory, half a mile at least from the Manor; two old servants for my body-guard; a lonely house and strange men seeking to enter it. Driven this way and that by my thoughts, at first I said that I would take Ean at his word, and hide away from it all like a true coward in my bed. This I would have done if the doing of it had not been unsupportable. I could not lie. My heart was beating so; every sound so distressed me, that I arose in desperation, and putting on my dressing gown with trembling fingers, determined to wake up my maid Humphreys; for, said I, she cannot be more afraid than I am. Not an over-bold resolution at the best, the execution of it would never have been attempted had I known what was in store for me. Shall I ever forget it, if I live a hundred years? The dark landing when I opened my bedroom door! The staircase with the great stained window and the moonlight shining down through it! These could not affright me. It was the whisper of voices I heard below, the soft tread of feet upon velvet-pile. Ah! those were sounds I shall ever remember!

The men had entered the house; they were coming upstairs. If I crossed the dark landing to my maid's room, assuredly I should alarm them. These were the reflections as I stood simply paralysed with fright and unable to utter a single cry or to move from the place. Step by step I heard the thieves creeping up the stairs until at last I could see them in the bay of the entresol and tell myself, in truth, that I was not dreaming. Then I do believe that I half swooned with terror.

They were coming up step by step to visit and to rob my brother's safe, kept in the dressing-room, where the Japanese, Okyada, usually slept. This much even my agitated mind impressed upon me. A terrified woman fearing discovery as something which might bring these men's vengeance upon her, yet for all the gold in the world I could not have uttered a single cry. A sense of utter dread robbed me of all power of will and speech. I could hear my heart beating so that I thought even they must hear it as they passed me by. And you shall imagine my feelings when I say that the rays from the dark lanterns they carried were turned upon the very door of my bedroom which I had but just shut behind me.

Had they been diverted a hair's-breadth to the right, they would have discovered me, standing with my back to the wall, a helpless and, I do protest, a pitiable figure. But the robbers were too set upon the jewels to delay for any such unlikely chance, and they went straight on to my brother's room; and entering it, to my surprise,

without difficulty, I heard them shut the door and lock it behind them.

So there I stood, my limbs still trembling, but the spell of immediate fear already a little removed from me. Dreading discovery no longer, I crossed the landing silently and entered my maid's room. A courageous woman, far braver than her mistress—for she is of Irish descent, and does not know what the meaning of fear is—she heard me with as little concern as if I had been ordering her to go shopping into Cambridge.

“The master's away in the Park,” she said; “then we must fetch him, mistress. I'll go myself. Do you wait here with me until I am dressed.”

I dreaded being left, and made no scruple to tell her so.

“Why, that's all right,” she exclaimed, quite cheerily. “I'll go and call Williams. They'll be off fast enough, mistress, if they get the diamonds. Now, do you just sit here quietly, and think nothing at all about it. I'll be there and back like master's motor-car. Sure, the impudence of them—to come to this house of all places in the world! They'll be robbing Buckingham Palace next!”

She was dressing the while she spoke, and being ready almost immediately, she put a shawl about her shoulders, and made to set off through the Park. When she had gone I locked the door—coward that I was—and sat all alone in the darkness, praying for my brother's coming. Indeed, I think that I counted the minutes, and had come to the belief that Humphreys had been gone a quarter of an hour—though I make sure now that it was not truly more than five minutes—when a terrible cry, something so inhuman, so dreadful, as to be beyond all my experience, rang out through the house, and was repeated again and again until the very night seemed to echo it.

What had happened? Had my brother returned, then? Was it his voice I had heard? Not for a hundred thousand pounds could I have remained any longer in that dark room with these dreadful questions for my company—and, unlocking the door, I ran out to the landing, calling “Ean! Ean! for God's sake tell me what has happened!”

He answered me at once, my dear brother, standing at the door of his dressing-room, just, as it seemed to me, as unconcerned as though he had been called up at daybreak to go out with his dogs and gun. Quick as he was, however, I had peeped into the room behind him, and then I saw something which even his cleverness could not hide from me. A man lay full length upon the floor, apparently dead. By his side there knelt the Japanese, Okyada, who chafed the limbs of the sufferer and tried to restore him to consciousness. This sight, I say, Ean could not conceal from me. But he shut the door at once, and, leading me away, he tried to tell me what it was.

“My dear Harriet, you see what comes of touching scientific implements. Here's a man who wanted to look inside my safe. He quite forgot that the door of it is connected up to a very powerful electric current. Don't be alarmed, but go back to your bed. Did I not tell you that there would be strange men about?”

“Ean,” I said, “for pity's sake let me know the truth. There were three men

altogether. I saw them in the garden; they passed me on the stairs. They were robbers, Ean; you cannot hide it from me.”

“You poor little Harriet,” he said, kissing me. “Of course they were robbers. I have been expecting them for a week or more. Did I tell you I should be in the observatory? That was foolish of me.”

“But there was a light there, dear.”

“Ah, yes; I wished my guests to think me star-gazing. Two of them are now returning to London as fast as their motor-car can carry them. The other will remain with us to recuperate. Go back to bed, Harriet, and tell yourself that all is as well as it could be.”

“Ean,” I said, “you are hiding something from me.”

“My dear sister,” he replied, “does a man in the dark hide anything from anybody? When I know, you shall be the first to hear. Believe me, this is no common burglary, or I would have acted very differently. There are deep secrets; I may have to leave you to search for them.”

His words astonished me very much. My own agitation could not measure his recollection or the unconcern which the strange episodes of the night had left to him. For my part, I could but pass long hours of meditation, in which I tried to gather up the tangled skein of this surpassing mystery. When morning came, my brother had left the house and Okyada with him. I have never seen him since that day, and his letters have told me little. He is upon a ship, well and happy, he says, and that ship is his own. His voyages have taken him to many ports, but he is not yet able to say when he will return.

“Be assured, dear sister,” he writes, “that the work to which I have set my hand would be approved by you, and that by God’s help I shall accomplish it. More I am unable to commit to writing for prudent reasons. You will keep the guards at the Manor until I am home, and my valuables will remain at the bank. Fear nothing, then, for yourself. The fellows who honoured us with their company—two of them, I should say—are now in South Africa. The third, who was a gentleman and may again become a man, is now on board this yacht. If he continues to behave himself, a farm in Canada and a little capital will be his reward. It is not the instruments but their makers whom I seek; and when they are found, then, dear Harriet, will we enjoy halcyon days together.”

To these words he added others, speaking of more private matters and those which were of concern but to him and to me. By the “guards” he meant an ex-sergeant-major and two old soldiers whom he had engaged upon his departure to watch the house in his absence. For myself, however, I was no longer afraid. Perhaps my unrest had been less if Ean had been altogether frank with me; but his vague intimation, the knowledge that he was far from me, and the inseparable instinct of his danger, contributed alike to my foreboding.

That these were not without reason subsequent events have fully justified. I have heard of his yacht as being in the South Atlantic. There have been rare letters from him, but none that says what secret it is which keeps him away from me. And for a

whole month now I have received no letter at all. That other friends, unknown to me personally but staunch to my dear brother, put the worst construction upon his silence, the recent paragraph in the London newspapers makes very clear. What can a helpless woman do that these true friends are not doing? She can but pray to the Almighty for the safety of one very dear to her—nay, all that she has to live and hope for in this world of sorrow and affliction.

## CHAPTER IV.

### EAN FABOS BEGINS HIS STORY.

*June 15th, 1904.*

So to-night my task begins.

I am to prove that there is a conspiracy of crime so well organised, so widespread, so amazing in its daring, that the police of all the civilised countries are at present unable either to imagine or to defeat it—I am to do this or pay the supreme penalty of failure, ignominious and irrevocable.

I cannot tell you when first it was that some suspicion of the existence of this great republic of thieves and assassins first came to me. Years ago, I asked myself if it were not possible. There has been no great jewel robbery for a decade past which has not found me more zealous than the police themselves in study of its methods and judgment of its men. I can tell you the weight and size almost of every great jewel stolen, either in Europe or America, during the past five years. I know the life history of the men who are paying the penalty for some of those crimes. I can tell you whence they came and what was their intention should they have carried their booty away. I know the houses in London, in Paris, in Vienna, in Berlin where you may change a stolen diamond for money as readily as men cash a banknote across a counter. But there my knowledge has begun and ended. I feel like a child before a book whose print it cannot read. There is a great world of crime unexplored, and its very cities are unnamed. How, then, should a man begin his studies? I answer that he cannot begin them unless his destiny opens the book.

Let me set down my beliefs a little plainer. If ever the story be read, it will not be by those who have my grammar of crime at their call, or have studied, as I have studied, the gospel of robbery as long years expound it. It would be idle to maintain at great length my belief that the leading jewel robberies of the world are directed by one brain and organised by one supreme intelligence. If my own pursuit of this intelligence fail, the world will never read this narrative. If it succeed, the facts must be their own witnesses, speaking more eloquently than any thesis. Let me be content in this place to relate but a single circumstance. It is that of the discovery of a dead body just three years ago on the lonely seashore by the little fishing village of Palling, in Norfolk.

Now, witness this occurrence. The coastguard—for rarely does any but a coastguardsman tramp that lonely shore—a coastguard, patrolling his sandy beat at six o'clock of a spring morning, comes suddenly upon the body of a ship's officer, lying stark upon the golden beach, cast there by the flood tide and left stranded by the ebb. No name upon the buttons of the pilot coat betrayed the vessel which this

young man had served. His cap, needless to say, they did not find. He wore jack-boots such as an officer of a merchantman would wear; his clothes were of Navy serge; there was a briar pipe in his left-hand pocket, a silver tobacco box in his right; he carried a gold watch, and it had stopped at five minutes past five o'clock. The time, however, could not refer to the morning of this discovery. It was the coastguardsman's opinion that the body had been at least three days in the water.

Such a fatality naturally deserved no more than a brief paragraph in any daily paper. I should have heard nothing of it but for my friend Murray, of Scotland Yard, who telegraphed for me upon the afternoon of the following day; and, upon my arrival at his office, astonished me very much by first showing me an account of the circumstance in the *Eastern Daily Press*, and then passing for my examination a roll of cotton wool such as diamond brokers carry.

"I want your opinion," he said without preface. "Do you know anything of the jewels in that parcel?"

There were four stones lying a-glitter upon the wool. One of them, a great gem of some hundred and twenty carats, rose-coloured, and altogether magnificent, I recognised at a single glance at the precious stones.

"That," I said, "is the Red Diamond of Ford Valley. Ask Baron Louis de Rothschild, and he will tell you whose property it was."

"Would you be very surprised to hear that it was found upon the body of the young sailor?"

"Murray," I said, "you have known me too long to expect me to be surprised by anything."

"But it is somewhat out of the way, isn't it? That's why I sent for you. The other stones don't appear to be of the same class. But they're valuable, I should think."

I turned them over in my hand and examined them with little interest.

"This pure white is a Brazilian," said I. "It may be worth a hundred and fifty pounds. The other two are jewellers' common stuff. They would make a pretty pair of ear-rings for your daughter, Murray. You should make the Treasury an offer for them. Say fifty for the pair."

"The police haven't much money to waste on the ladies' ears," he said rather hardily; "we prefer 'em without ornament—they go closer to the doors. I thought you would like to hear about this. We can't make much of it here, and I don't suppose you'll make more. A ship's officer like that—you don't expect him to be a fence in a common way, and he's about the last you'd name for a professional hand in Paris—for if this is Baron Louis's stone, as you say, it must have been stolen in Paris."

"No reason at all, Murray. His wife wore it in her tiara. She was at the Prince's, I believe, no more than a month ago. Does that occur to you?"

He shrugged his shoulders as though I had been judging his capacity, which, God knows, would have been an unprofitable employment enough.

"We haven't begun to think about it," he said. "How can we? No ship has reported his loss. He carried a pipe, a tobacco box, a gold watch, and this. Where



does your clue start? Tell me that, and I'll go on it."

"There are no papers, then?"

"None—that is, this paper. And if you can make head or tail of it, I'll give a hundred pounds to a hospital."

He passed across the table a worn and tattered letter case. It contained a dirty calendar of the year, a lock of dark-chestnut hair, a plain gold wedding ring, and a slip of paper with these words upon it:

"Captain Three Fingers—Tuesday."

"Is that all, Murray?" I asked when I had put the paper down.

"Absolutely all," he replied.

"You have searched him for secret pockets?"

"As a woman's bag at a remnant sale."

"Where did he carry the diamonds?"

"Inside his waistcoat—a double pocket lined with wool."

"No arms upon him?"

"Not a toothpick."

"And you have no trace of any vessel?"

"Lloyd's can tell us nothing. There has been no report made. It is evident that the man fell off a ship, though what ship, and where, heaven alone knows."

This, I am afraid, was obvious. The police had asked me to identify the jewels and now that it was done I could be of no more service to them. It remained to see what Baron Louis de Rothschild would have to say, and when I had reminded Murray of that, I took my leave. It would be idle to pretend that I had come to any opinion which might help him. To me, as to others, the case seemed one of profound mystery. A dead seaman carried jewels of great price hidden in his clothes, and he had fallen overboard from a ship. If some first tremor of an idea came to me, I found it in the word "ship." A seaman and a ship—yes, I must remember that.

And this will bring me to the last and most astonishing feature of this perplexing mystery. Baron Louis expressed the greatest incredulity when he heard of the loss of his famous jewel. It was at his banker's in Paris, he declared. A telegram to the French house brought the reply that they had the stone sure enough, and that it was in safe keeping, both literally and in metaphor. To this I answered by the pen of my friend at Scotland Yard that if the bankers would cause the stone to be examined for the second time, they would find it either to be false or of a quality so poor that it could never be mistaken by any expert for the Red Diamond of Ford Valley. Once more fact confirmed my suppositions. The jewel in Paris was a coarse stone, of little value, and as unlike the real gem as any stone could be. Plainly the Baron had been robbed, though when and by whom he had not the remotest idea.

You will admit that this twentieth century conception of theft is not without its ingenuity. The difference in value between a diamond of the first water and the third is as the difference between a sovereign and a shilling. Your latter day thief, desiring some weeks of leisure in which to dispose of a well-known jewel, will sometimes be content with less than the full value of his enterprise. He substitutes a

stone of dubious quality for one of undoubted purity. Madam, it may be, thinks her diamonds want cleaning, and determines to send them to the jeweller's when she can spare them. That may be in six months' time, when her beautiful gems are already sparkling upon the breast of a Rajah or his latest favourite. And she never can be certain that her diamonds were as fine as she believed them to be.

This I had long known. It is not a fact, however, which helps the police, nor have I myself at any time made much of it. Indeed, all that remained to me of the discovery upon Palling beach was the suggestion of a ship, and the possession of a slip of paper with its almost childish memorandum: "Captain Three Fingers—Tuesday."

## CHAPTER V.

### THE MAN WITH THE THREE FINGERS.

*Dr. Fabos continues his Story.*

I waited three years to meet a man with three fingers, and met him at last in a ball-room at Kensington. Such is the plain account of an event which must divert for the moment the whole current of my life, and, it may be, involve me in consequences so far-reaching and so perilous that I do well to ignore them. Let them be what they may, I am resolved to go on.

Horace has told us that it is good to play the fool in season. My own idea of folly is a revolt against the conventional, a retrogression from the servitude of parochial civilisation to the booths of unwashed Bohemia. In London, I am a member of the Goldsmith Club. Its wits borrow money of me and repay me by condescending to eat my dinners. Their talk is windy but refreshing. I find it a welcome contrast to that jargon of the incomprehensible which serves men of science over the walnuts. And there is a great deal of human nature to be studied in a borrower. The Archbishop of Canterbury himself could not be more dignified than some of those whose lives are to be saved by a trifling advance until Saturday.

Seven such Bohemians went at my charge to the Fancy Fair and Fête at Kensington. I had meant to stop there half an hour; I remained three hours. If you say that a woman solved the riddle, I will answer, "In a measure, yes." Joan Fordibras introduced herself to me by thrusting a bunch of roses into my face. I changed two words with her, and desired to change twenty. Some story in the girl's expression, some power of soul shining in her eyes, enchanted me and held me fast. Nor was I deceived at all. The story, I said, had no moral to it. They were not the eyes of an innocent child of nineteen as they should have been. They were the eyes of one who had seen and known the dark side of the lantern of life, who had suffered in her knowledge; who carried a great secret, and had met a man who was prepared to fathom it.

Joan Fordibras—that was her name. Judged by her impulsive manner, the brightness of her talk and the sweetness of her laugh, there was no more light-hearted girl in England that night. I alone, perhaps, in all that room, could tell myself that she carried a heavy burden, and would escape from it by *force majeure* of an indomitable will. Her talk I found vapid to the point of hysteria. She told me that she was half French and half American—"just which you like to call me." When I had danced twice with her she presented me to her father, General Fordibras—a fine military figure of a man, erect and manly, and gifted with eyes which many a woman must have remembered. These things I observed at a glance, but that

which I was presently to see escaped my notice for some minutes. General Fordibras, it appears, had but three fingers to his left hand.

I say that I observed the fact negligently, and did not for the moment take full cognizance of its singularity. Alone in my chambers at the Albany, later on, I lighted my pipe and asked myself some sane questions. A man who had lost a finger of his left hand was not such a wonder, surely, that I could make much of it. And yet that sure instinct, which has never failed me in ten years of strenuous investigation, refused stubbornly to pass the judgment by. Again in imagination I stood upon Palling beach and looked upon the figure of the dead sailor. The great sea had cast him out—for what? The black paper, did not an avenging destiny write the words upon it? “Captain Three Fingers!” Was I a madman, then, to construct a story for myself and to say, “To-night I have seen the man whom the dead served. I have shaken him by the hand. I have asked him to my house”? Time will answer that question for good or ill. I know but this—that, sitting there alone at the dead of night, I seemed to be groping, not in a house, or a room, or a street, but over the whole world itself for the momentous truth. None could share that secret with me. The danger and the ecstasy of it alike were my own.

Who was this General Fordibras, and what did the daughter know of his life? I have written that I invited them both to my house in Suffolk, and thither they came in the spring of the year. Okyada, the shrewdest servant that ever earned the love and gratitude of an affectionate master, could not help me to identify the General. We had never met him in our travels, never heard of him, could not locate him. I concluded that he was just what he pretended to be so far as his birth and parentage were concerned—a Frenchman naturalised in America; a rich man to boot, and the owner of the steam yacht *Connecticut*, as he himself had told me. The daughter Joan astonished me by her grace and dignity, and the extent of her attainments. One less persistent would have put suspicion by and admitted that circumstances justified no doubt about these people; that they were truly father and daughter travelling for pleasure in Europe, and that any other supposition must be an outrage. Indeed, I came near to believing so myself. The pearls which had been stolen from me in Paris, was it not possible that the General had bought them in market overt? To say that his agents had stolen them, and that his daughter wore them under my very nose, would be to write him down a maniac. I knew not what to think; the situation baffled me entirely. In moments of sentiment I could recall the womanly tenderness and distress of little Joan Fordibras, and wonder that I had made so slight a response. There were other hours when I said, “Beware—there is danger; these people know you—they are setting a trap for you.” Let us blame human nature alone if this latter view came to be established at no distant date. Three men burgled my house in Suffolk in the month of June. Two of them escaped; the third put his hands upon the brass knob of my safe, and the electric wires I had trained there held him as by a vice of fire. He fell shrieking at my feet, and in less than an hour I had his story.

Of course I had been waiting for these men. An instinct such as mine can be

diverted by no suggestions either romantic or platonic. From the first, my reason had said that General Fordibras might have come to Deepdene for no other reason than to prepare the way for the humbler instruments who should follow after. Okyada, my little Jap, he of the panther's tread and the eagle eye—he stood sentinel during these weeks, and no blade of grass in all my park could have been trodden but that he would have known it. We were twice ready for all that might occur. We knew that strangers had come down from London to Six Mile Bottom station one hour after they arrived there. When they entered the house, we determined to take but one of them. The others, racing frantically for liberty, believed that they had outwitted us. Poor fools, they were racing to the gates of a prison.

I dragged the thief to his feet and began to threaten and to question him. He was a lad of twenty, I should say, hatchet-faced and with tousled yellow hair. When he spoke to me I discovered that he had the public school voice and manner, never to be mistaken under any circumstances.

“Now come,” I said; “here is seven years' penal servitude waiting for you on the doorstep. Let me see that there is some spark of manhood left in you yet. Otherwise——” But here I pointed again to the electric wires, which had burned his hands, and he shuddered at my gesture.

“Oh, I'll play the game,” he said. “You won't get anything out of me. Do what you like—I'm not afraid of you.”

It was a lie, for he was very much afraid of me. One glance told me that the boy was a coward.

“Okyada,” I said, calling my servant, “here is someone who is not afraid of you. Tell him what they do to such people in Japan.”

The little fellow played his part to perfection. He took the craven lad by both his hands and began to drag him back toward the wires. A resounding shriek made me tremble for the nerves of my dear sister, Harriet. I went to the door to reassure her, and when I returned the lad was on his knees, sobbing like a woman.

“I can't stand pain—I never could,” he said. “If you're a gentleman, you won't ask me to give away my pals.”

“Your pals,” I said quietly, “being the refuse of Europe—rogues and bullies and blackmailers. A nice gang for a man who played cricket for his house at Harrow.”

He looked at me amazed.

“How the devil do you know that?”

“You have the colours in your tie. Now stand up and answer my questions. Your silence cannot save those who sent you here to-night. They knew perfectly well that you would fail; they wished you to fail, and to lie to me when they caught you. I am not the man to be lied to. Understand that; I have certain little secrets of my own. You have investigated one of them. Do not compel me to demonstrate the others to you.”

I could see that he was thinking deeply. Presently he asked:

“What are you going to do with me? What's the game if I split?”

“Answer me truly,” I said, “and I will keep you out of prison.”

“That’s all very fine——”

“I will keep you out of prison and try to save you from yourself.”

“You can’t do that, sir.”

“We will see. There is at the heart of every man a seed of God’s sowing, which neither time nor men may kill. I shall find it in yours, my lad. Oh, think of it! When you stood at the wicket in the playing fields of Harrow, your beloved school, your friends about you when you had a home, a mother, sisters, gentle hands to welcome you; was it to bring you to such a night as this? No, indeed. There is something which is sleeping, but may wake again—a voice to call you; a hand upon your shoulder compelling you to look back. Let it be my hand, lad. Let mine be the voice which you hear. It will be kinder than others which may speak afterwards.”

His face blanched oddly at my words. An hour ago he would have heard them with oaths and curses. Now, however, his bravado had gone with his courage. Perhaps I had made no real appeal to the old instincts of his boyhood. But his fear and his hope of some advantage of confession brought him to his knees.

“I can’t tell you much,” he stammered.

“You can tell me what you know.”

“Well—what about it then?”

“Ah! that is reason speaking. First, the name of the man.”

“What man do you speak of?”

“The man who sent you to this house. Was it from Paris, from Rome, from Vienna? You are wearing French boots, I see. Then it was Paris, was it not?”

“Oh, call it Paris, if you like.”

“And the man—a Frenchman?”

“I can’t tell you. He spoke English. I met him at Quaz-Arts, and he introduced me to the others—a big man with a slash across his jaw and pock-marked. He kept me at a great hotel six weeks. I was dead out of luck—went over there to get work in a motor-works and got chucked—well, I don’t say for what. Then Val came along——”

“Val—a Christian name?”

“I heard the rest of it was Imroth. Some said he was a German Jew who had been in Buenos Ayres. I don’t know. We were to get the stuff easy and all cross back by different routes. Mine was Southampton—Havre. I’d have been back in Paris to-morrow night but for you. Good God, what luck!”

“The best, perhaps, you ever had in your wretched life. Please to go on. You were to return to Paris—with the diamonds?”

“Oh, no; Rouge la Gloire carried those—on the ship, of course. I was to cross the scent. You don’t know Val Imroth. There isn’t another man like him in Paris. If he thought I’d told you this, he’d murder the pair of us, though he crossed two continents to do it. I’ve seen him at it. My God, if you’d seen all I’ve seen, Dr. Fabos!”

“You have my name, it appears. I am not so fortunate.”

He hung down his head, and I saw with no little satisfaction that he blushed like

a girl.

“I was Harry Avenhill once,” he said.

“The son of Dr. Avenhill, of Cambridge?”

“It’s as true as night.”

“Thank God that your father is dead. We will speak of him again—when the seed has begun to grow a little warm. I want now to go back a step. This ship in which my diamonds were to go——”

He started, and looked at me with wild eyes.

“I never said anything about any ship!”

“No? Then I was dreaming it. You yourself were to return to Paris *viâ* Havre and Southampton, I think; while this fellow Rouge la Gloire, he went from Newhaven.”

“How did you know that?”

“Oh, I know many things. The ship, then, is waiting for him—shall we say in Shoreham harbour?”

It was a pure guess upon my part, but I have never seen a man so struck by astonishment and wonder. For some minutes he could not say a single word. When he replied, it was in the tone of one who could contest with me no longer.

“If you know, you know,” he said. “But look here, Dr. Fabos; you have spoken well to me, and I’ll speak well to you. Leave Val Imroth alone. You haven’t a month to live if you don’t.”

I put my hand upon his shoulder, and turned him round to look me full in the face.

“Harry Avenhill,” said I, “did they tell you, then, that Dr. Fabos was a woman? Listen to me, now. I start to-morrow to hunt these people down. You shall go with me; I will find a place for you upon my yacht. We will seek this Polish Jew together—him and others, and by the help of God above me, we will never rest until we have found them.”

He could not reply to me. I summoned Okyada, and bade him find a bedroom for Mr. Harry Avenhill.

“We leave by the early train for Newcastle,” I said. “See that Mr. Avenhill is called in time. And please to tell my sister that I am coming to have a long talk with her.”

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My poor sister! However will she live if there are no slippers to be aired or man’s untidiness to be corrected! Her love for me is very sweet and true. I could wish almost that my duty would leave me here in England to enjoy it.

## CHAPTER VI.

### A CHALLENGE FROM A WOMAN.

*Dr. Fabos joins his Yacht "White Wings."*

I had given the name of *White Wings* to my new turbine yacht, and this, I confess, provokes the merriment of mariners both ancient and youthful. We are painted a dirty grey, and have the true torpedo bows—to say nothing of our low-lying stern rounded like a shark's back and just as formidable to look upon when we begin to make our twenty-five knots. The ship is entirely one after my own heart. I will not deny that an ambition of mastery has affected me from my earliest days. My castles must be impregnable, be they upon the sea or ashore. And the yacht which Yarrow built for me has no superior upon any ocean.

The boat, I say, was built upon the Thames and engined upon the Tyne. I remember that I ordered it three days after I wrote the word "ship" in my diary; upon a morning when the notion first came to me that the sea and not the land harboured the world's great criminals, and that upon the sea alone would they be taken. To none other than the pages of my diary may I reveal this premonition yet awhile. The police would mock it; the public remain incredulous. And so I keep my secret, and I carry it with me. God knows to what haven.

We left Newcastle, bravely enough, upon the second day of September in the year 1904. A member of the Royal Yacht Squadron by favour and friendship of the late Prince Valikoff, of Moscow, whose daughter's life he declared that I saved, we flew the White Ensign, and were named, I do not doubt, for a Government ship. Few would have guessed that this was the private yacht of an eccentric Englishman; that he had embarked upon one of the wildest quests ever undertaken by an amateur, and that none watched him go with greater interest than his friend Murray, of Scotland Yard. But such was the naked truth. And even Murray had but a tithe of the secret.

A long, wicked-looking yacht! I liked to hear my friends say that. When I took them aboard and showed them the monster turbines, the spacious quarters for my men beneath the cupola of the bows, and aft, my own cabins, furnished with some luxury and no little taste, I hope—then it was of the Hotel Ritz they talked, and not of any wickedness at all. My own private room was just such a cabin as I have always desired to find upon a yacht. Deep sloping windows of heavy glass permitted me to see the white foaming wake astern and the blue horizon above it. I had to my hand the books that I love; there were pictures of my own choosing cunningly let into the panels of rich Spanish mahogany. Ornaments of silver added dignity but no display. Not a spacious room, I found that its situation abaft gave me that privacy I



sought, and made of it as it were a house apart. Here none entered who had not satisfied my little Jap that his business was urgent. I could write for hours with no more harassing interruption than that of a gull upon the wing or the echo of the ship's bells heard afar. The world of men and cities lay down yonder below the ether. The great sea shut its voices out, and who would regret them or turn back to hear their message?

Let pride in my ship, then, be the first emotion I shall record in this account of her voyages. Certainly the summer smiled upon us when we started down the turbid, evil-smelling river Tyne, and began to dip our whale-nosed bows to the North Sea. The men I had shipped for the service, attracted by the terms of my offer, and drawn from the cream of the yachting ports of England, were as fine a lot as ever trod a spotless deck. Benson, my chief engineer, used to be one of Yarrow's most trusted experts. Captain Larry had been almost everything nautical, both afloat and ashore. A clean-shaven, blue-eyed, hard-faced man, I have staked my fortune upon his courage. And how shall I forget Cain and Abel, the breezy twin quartermasters from County Cork—to say nothing of Balaam, the Scotch boatswain, or Merry, the little cockney cook! These fellows had been taken aside and told one by one frankly that the voyage spelled danger, and after danger, reward. They accepted my conditions with a frankness which declared their relish for them. I had but three refusals, and one of these, Harry Avenhill, had no title to be a chooser.

Such was the crew which steamed with me, away from gloomy Newcastle, southward, I knew not to what seas or harbourage. To be just, certain ideas and conjectures of my own dictated a vague course, and were never absent from my reckoning. I believed that the ocean had living men's secrets in her possession, and that she would yield them up to me. Let Fate, I said, stand at the tiller, and Prudence be her handmaiden. But one man in all Europe knew that I intended to call at the port of Havre, and afterwards to steam for Cape Town. To others I told a simpler tale. The yacht was my hobby, the voyage a welcome term of idleness. They rarely pursued the subject further.

Now, I had determined to call at the port of Havre, not because I had any business to do there, but because intelligence had come to me that Joan Fordibras was spending some weeks at Dieppe, and that I should find her at the Hôtel de Palais. We made a good passage down the North Sea, and on the morning following our arrival I stood among a group of lazy onlookers, who watched the bathers go down to the sea at Dieppe and found their homely entertainment therein. Joan Fordibras was one of the last to bathe, but many eyes followed her with interest, and I perceived that she was an expert swimmer, possessed of a graceful figure, and of a daring in the water which had few imitators among her sex. Greatly admired and evidently very well known, many flatterers surrounded her when she had dressed, and I must have passed her by at least a dozen times before she suddenly recognised me, and came running up to greet me.

"Why, it's Dr. Fabos, of London! Isn't it, now?" she exclaimed. "I thought I could not be mistaken. Whoever would have believed that so grave a person would

spend his holiday at Dieppe?"

"Two days," said I, answering her to the point. "I am yachting round the coast, and some good instinct compelled me to come here."

She looked at me, I thought, a little searchingly. A woman's curiosity was awake, in spite of her nineteen years. None the less she made a pretty picture enough; and the scene about stood for a worthy frame. Who does not know the summer aspect of a French watering-place—the fresh blue sea, the yellow beach, the white houses with the green jalousies, the old Gothic churches with their crazy towers—laughter and jest and motor-cars everywhere—Mademoiselle La France tripping over the shingle with well-poised ankle—her bathing dress a very miracle of ribbons and diminuendos—the life, the vivacity, the joy of it, and a thousand parasols to roof the whispers in. So I saw Mistress Joan amid such a scene. She, this shrewd little schemer of nineteen, began to suspect me.

"Who told you that I was at Dieppe?" she asked quickly.

"Instinct, the best of guides. Where else could you have been?"

"Why not at Trouville?"

"Because I am not there."

"My, what a reason! Did you expect to find my father here?"

"Certainly not. He sailed in his yacht for Cherbourg three days ago."

"Then I shall call you a wizard. Please tell me why you wanted to see me."

"You interested me. Besides, did not I say that I would come? Would you have me at Eastbourne or Cromer, cooped up with women who talk in stares and men whose ambitions rot in bunkers? I came to see you. That is a compliment. I wished to say good-bye to you before you return to America."

"But we are not going to Amer—that is, of course, my home is there. Did not father tell you that?"

"Possibly. I have a poor head for places. There are so many in America."

"But I just love them," she said quickly; and then, with mischief in her eyes, she added, "No one minds other people trying to find out all about them in America."

It was a sly thrust and told me much. This child did not carry a secret, I said; she carried the fear that there might be a secret. I had need of all my tact. How fate would laugh at me if I fell in love with her! But that was a fool's surmise, and not to be considered.

"Curiosity," I said, "may have one of two purposes. It may desire to befriend or to injure. Please consider that when you have the time to consider anything. I perceive that there are at least a dozen young men waiting to tell you that you are very beautiful. Do not let me forbid them. As we are staying at the same hotel——"

"What? You have gone to the Palais?"

"Is there any other house while you are in Dieppe?"

She flushed a little and turned away her head. I saw that I had frightened her; and reflecting upon the many mistakes that so-called tact may make sometimes, I invented a poor excuse and left her to her friends.

Plainly, her eyes had challenged me. And the Man, I said, must not hesitate to

pick up the glove which my Lady of Nineteen had thrown down so bravely.

## CHAPTER VII.

### MY FRIEND McSHANUS.

*Dr. Fabos at Dieppe.*

I thought that I knew no one in Dieppe, but I was wrong, as you shall see; and I had scarcely set foot in the hotel when I ran against no other than Timothy McShanus, the journalist of Fleet Street, and found myself in an instant listening to his odd medley of fact and fancy. For the first time for many years he was in no immediate need of a little loan.

“Faith,” says he, “’tis the best thing that ever ye heard. The Lord Mayor of this very place is dancing and feasting the County Councillors—and me, Timothy McShanus, is amongst ’em. Don’t ask how it came about. I’ll grant ye there is another McShanus in the Parlyment—a rare consated divil of a man that they may have meant to ask to the rejoicin’. Well, the letter came to worthier hands—and by the honour of ould Ireland, says I, ’tis this McShanus that will eat their victuals. So here I am, me bhoy, and ye’ll order what ye like, and my beautiful La France shall pay for it. Shovels of fire upon me head, if I shame their liquor——”

I managed to arrest his ardour, and, discovering that he had enjoyed the hospitality of Dieppe for three days upon another man’s invitation, and that the end of the pleasant tether had been reached, I asked him to dine with me, and he accepted like a shot.

“’Tis for the pleasure of me friend’s company. To-morrow ye shall dine with me and the Mayor—me old friend the Mayor—that I have known since Tuesday morning. We’ll have fine carriages afterwards, and do the woods and the forests. Ye came here, I’ll be saying, because ye heard that the star of Timothy McShanus was on high? ’Twould be that, no doubt. What the divil else should bring such an astronomer man to Dieppe?”

I kept it from him a little while; but when he rejoined me at the dinner table later on, the first person he clapped his eyes upon was little Joan Fordibras, sitting with a very formidable-looking chaperone three tables from our own. The expression upon his face at this passed all simile. I feared that every waiter in the room would overhear his truly Celtic outburst.

“Mother of me ancestors!” he cried; “but ’tis the little shepherdess herself. Ean Fabos, have shame to admit it. ’Twas neither the stars of the celestial heavens nor the beauty of the firmament that carried ye to this shore. And me that was naming it the wit and the beauty of me native country. Oh, Timothy McShanus, how are the mighty fallen! No longer——”

I hustled him to his seat and showed my displeasure very plainly. As for little

Joan Fordibras, while she did not hear his words, his manner set her laughing, and in this she was imitated by French and English women round about. Indeed, I defy the greatest of professors to withstand this volatile Irishman, or to be other than amused by his amazing eccentricities.

“We’ll drink champagne to her, Fabos, me bhoy,” he whispered as the soup was served. “Sure, matrimony is very like that same wine—a good thing at the beginning, but not so good when you take overmuch of it. ’Twould be married I had been meself to the Lady Clara Lovenlow of Kildare, but for the blood of Saxons in her veins. Ay, and a poor divil of a man I would be this same time, if I had done it. Sure, think of Timothy McShanus with his feet in the family slippers and his daughters singing ‘The Lost Chord’ to him. Him that is the light of the Goldsmith Club. Who goeth home even with the milk! Contemplate it, me bhoy, and say what a narrow escape from that designing wench he has had.”

He rattled on, and I did not interrupt him. To be plain, I was glad of his company. Had it appeared to Joan Fordibras that I was quite alone in the hotel, that I knew no friends in Dieppe, and had no possible object in visiting the town but to renew acquaintance with her during her father’s absence—had this been so, then the difficulties of our intercourse were manifest. Now, however, I might shelter my intentions behind this burly Irishman. Indeed, I was delighted at the encounter.

“McShanus,” I said, “don’t be a fool. Or if you must be one, don’t include me in the family relationship. Do I look like a man whose daughters will be permitted to sing the ‘Lost Chord’ to him?”

“Ye can never judge by looks, Docthor. Me friend Luke O’Brien, him that wrote ‘The Philosophy of Loneliness’ in the newspapers, he’s seven children in County Cork and runs a gramophone store. ‘Luke,’ says I, ‘’tis a fine solitude ye have entirely.’ ‘Be d——d to that,’ says he—and we haven’t spoken since.”

“Scarcely delicate to mention it, McShanus. Let me relieve your feelings by telling you that my yacht, *White Wings*, will be here to-morrow night to fetch me.”

“Glory be to God, ye’ll be safe on the sea. I mistrust the colleen entirely. Look at the eyes of it. D’ye see the little foot peepin’ in and out—‘like mice beneath the petticoat,’ says the poet. She’s anxious to show ye she’s a small foot and won’t cost ye much in shoe leather. Turn your head away when she laughs, Ean, me bhoy. ’Tis a wicked bit of a laugh, and to a man’s destruction.”

“I must remember this, McShanus. Do you think you could entertain the old lady while I talk to her?”

“What, the she-cat with the man’s hair and the telescope? The Lord be good to me. I’d sooner do penal servitude.”

“Now, come, you can see by her glance that she is an authority upon some of the ’isms, McShanus. I know that she plays golf. I saw her carrying sticks this very afternoon.”

“To break heads at a fair. Is Timothy McShanus fallen to this? To tread at the heels of a she-man with sticks in her hands. Faith, ’twould be a fancy fair and fête entirely.”

“Drink some more champagne, and brace yourself up to it, Timothy.”

He shook his head and lapsed into a melancholy silence. Certainly his nerves required bracing up for the ordeal, and many glasses of '89 Pommery went to that process. When dinner was done, we strolled out upon the verandah and found Miss Fordibras and her chaperone, Miss Aston, drinking coffee at one of the little tables in the vestibule. They made way for us at once, as though we had been expected, and I presented McShanus to them immediately.

“Mr. Timothy McShanus—the author of ‘Ireland and Her Kings.’ He’s descended from the last of them, I believe. Is it not so, McShanus?”

“From all of them, Dr. Fabos. Me father ruled Ireland in the past, and me sons will rule it in the future. Ladies, your servant. Be not after calling me an historian. ’Tis a poet I am when not in the police courts.”

Miss Aston, the elderly lady with the short hair and the glasses, took McShanus seriously, I am afraid. She began to speak to him of Browning and Walt Whitman and Omar Khayyam. I drew my chair near to Miss Fordibras and took my text from the common talk.

“No one reads poetry nowadays,” I said. “We have all grown too cynical. Even McShanus does not consider his immortal odes worth publishing.”

“They will perish with me in an abbey tomb,” said he; “a thousand years from now, ’tis the professors from New Zealand who will tell the world what McShanus wrote.”

Miss Aston suggested a little tritely that much modern poetry should be so treated.

“Time is the true critic,” she exclaimed majestically, and McShanus looked at me as who should say, “She has some experience of that same Time.”

I turned to Joan Fordibras and asked her to defend the poets.

“The twentieth century gives us no solitudes,” I said; “you cannot have poets without solitudes. We live in crowds nowadays. Even yachting is a little old-fashioned. Men go where other men can see them show off. Vanity takes them there—even Bridge is vanity, the desire to do better than the other man.”

Miss Aston demurred.

“There are some women who know nothing of vanity,” she said stonily. “We live within ourselves, and our lives are our own. Our whole existence is a solitude. We are most truly alone when many surround us.”

“’Tis a compliment to my friend Fabos,” cried McShanus triumphantly. “Let me have the honour to escort ye to the Casino, lady, for such a man is no company for us. No doubt he’ll bring Miss Fordibras over when they’ve done with the poets. Will ye not, doctor?”

I said that I should be delighted, and when the cloaks had been found we all set out for the Casino. Timothy was playing his part well, it appeared. I found myself alone with Joan Fordibras presently—and neither of us had the desire to hurry on to the Casino. In truth, the season at Dieppe had already begun to wane, and there were comparatively few people abroad on the parade by the sea-shore. We walked apart,

a great moon making golden islands of light upon the sleeping sea, and the distant music of the Casino band in our ears.

“This time to-morrow,” I said, “my yacht will be nearer Ushant than Dieppe.”

She looked up at me a little timidly. I thought that I had rarely seen a face at once so pathetic and so beautiful.

“Away to the solitudes?” she asked quickly.

“Possibly,” I said; “but that is the point about yachting. You set out for nowhere, and if you don’t like it, you come back again.”

“And you positively don’t know where you are going?”

“I positively don’t know where I am going.”

“But I do,” she said. “You are going to follow my father.”

I had never been so amazed in my life. To say that I was astonished would be to misrepresent the truth. I knew already that she suspected me; but this challenge—from a mere child—this outspoken defiance, it passed all comprehension.

“Why should I follow your father?” I asked her as quickly.

“I do not know, Dr. Fabos. But you are following him. You suspect him, and you wish to do us an injury.”

“My dear child,” I said, “God forbid that I should do any man an injury. You do not mean what you say. The same cleverness which prompts this tells you also that anything I may be doing is right and proper to do—and should be done. May we not start from that?”

I turned about and faced her. We had come almost to the water’s edge by this time. The lazy waves were rolling at our feet—the waves of that sea I purposed to cross in quest of a truth which should astonish the world. The hour was momentous to both our lives. We knew it so to be and did not flinch from it.

“Oh,” she said, with tears in her eyes, “if I could only believe you to be my friend.”

“Miss Fordibras,” I said, “believe it now because I tell you so. Your friend whatever may befall. Please to call me that.”

I think that she was about to confess to me the whole story of her life. I have always thought that it might have been so at that moment. But the words remained unspoken—for a shadow fell upon us as we talked, and, looking up, I perceived the figure of a man so near to us that his outstretched hand could have touched my own. And instantly perceiving it also, she broke away from me and begged me to take her to the Casino.

“Miss Aston will be anxious,” she cried, excited upon compulsion. “Please let us go. It must be nine o’clock.”

I rejoined that I was quite in ignorance of the fact; but, taking her cue, I led the way from the place and turned toward the Casino. The light of an arc lamp as we went showed me her young face as pale as the moonbeams upon the still sea before us. I understood that the man had been watching her, and that she was afraid of him. Indeed, no artifice could conceal so plain a fact.

Of this, however, she would not speak at all. In the Casino, she went straight to

the side of the formidable Miss Aston, and began to babble some idle excuse for our delay. McShanus himself was playing at Petits Chevaux and making the room ring with his exclamations. I understood that the hour for confidence had passed, and that the words she had meant to speak to me might go for ever unspoken.

Was it well that this should be? God knows. The path of my duty lay clearly marked before me. Not even the hand of Joan Fordibras must turn me aside therefrom. I could but hope that time would lift the shadows and let me see the sun beyond them.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### WE VISIT AFRICA.

#### *The Voyage of the "White Wings."*

"And what, in Truth's name, brings ye to such a shore as this?"

I had been standing to spy out the low African coast, and had forgotten the very existence of Timothy McShanus until he spoke to me. Just, indeed, his question appeared to be. Why had I left Europe, my home, my friends, to visit this desolate No-Man's-Land, speaking to us as it did of the ultimate desolation and the far kingdoms of solitude? Why had I chosen such a course—and, almost greater wonder, why was such a man as Timothy McShanus aboard with me?

We had left Dieppe almost a month ago. The fastest yacht afloat, as I liked to call our *White Wings*, had permitted us to call for a day or two at Gib., to put in at Porto Grande in the Cape de Verde Islands; thence to cruise almost at our leisure by the great flat African shore until the hills began to show themselves beyond the surf, and we knew that we were gazing upon English land once more. The question "Why?" remained none the less an enigma to the ship. The men could but call their employer a crank, and justly marvel at his ideas. Timothy McShanus alone ventured to exclaim upon them.

"Ye pick me up at Dieppe," said he, "and tell me 'tis a bit of a pleasure voyage. I don't refuse ye, thinking that we will sail away to Spain and twirl a while with the señoritas; but divil a señorita in all the journey. Ye dose me with Spanish wine at Gibralthar, and say I shall keep Christmas in Pall Mall—me that was never out of London a week but I fell to weeping for me children. And here we are in the Old Man's country, and swim ye must would ye go ashore. Ah, be honest with a man, Ean, me bhoy. Ye're afther something deep, and none but the little Jap has the secret of it. Say 'tis so, and I, Timothy, will trust ye to the world's end."

"Timothy," I rejoined, for the time had come when I must speak openly with him, "you know me well enough to say that I am neither a fool nor a child. I'll tell you in a word why I came to Africa. It was to learn who stole my bronze pearls which Joan Fordibras wore at Kensington."

It is never difficult to surprise Timothy McShanus, for he is a man of many exclamations. I think, however, that he approached the confines of astonishment that morning. Turning about, he looked me full in the face—then placed his immense hand affectionately upon my shoulder. The measure of his brogue displayed his interest.

"'Tis no jest, Ean?"

"No jest at all, Timothy."

“Ye believe that the truth is afloat upon the sea?”

“I believe it so much that I have spent a fifth of my fortune in fitting out this yacht, and will spend three-fifths more if expenditure will help me to the truth.”

“And there is no man alive but me knows the secret?”

“There is a man and there is a woman. I have told it to neither. The man is my Japanese servant, from whom nothing under heaven is hidden. The woman—for in knowledge she is such—is Joan Fordibras.”

He shook his head as though in a measure disappointed.

“Your Jap is Satan himself I’ll not deny him. The girl’s another matter. ’Tis a maniac the ould gentleman would be to steal your jewels and to let his daughter wear ’em under your very nose. Fabos, me bhoys, ye don’t believe that?”

“I will tell you when the time comes, Timothy. It should not be far distant. On the other hand, a year may find me still afloat. Don’t be alarmed, man. I promise you that the first steamer leaving Cape Town after our arrival shall carry you to your beloved Pall Mall. My own duty is plain. I cannot shirk it, let the consequences be what they may. At least, you have had a pleasant voyage, Timothy?”

“A pleasant voyage and the best of company. Your Japanese pitched me across the cabin yesterday for to show me how they do it in his country. Ye have a Scotchman aboard who makes me cross the Equather in a kilt, and two vagabonds from County Cork who tell me the moon is a staymer on the starboard bow. I play piquet with ye all day, and ye win the savings of a lifetime—seven pounds, four shillings, and twopence as I’m a living man. Oh, ’tis a pleasant voyage, sure enough. And for what, Fabos? You’re a magician, could you tell me that?”

“No magician at all, Timothy. Put the same question to me at eight bells tonight, and I may be able to answer you. If I am not very much mistaken, the smoke of it is on yonder horizon now. I will tell you when it is safe to speak—not a minute sooner or later.”

This, perhaps, I said with some warmth of earnestness which he could not mistake. To be candid, it was ridiculous that so small a thing could excite me, and yet excited I was, as I had not been since the first conception of my beliefs came to me on the beach at Palling long months ago. Just a haze of smoke upon the horizon—just the knowledge that some other ship piloted us in our course down the southern shores of Africa. That was all we saw, and yet no man aboard but did not see it with beating heart and nerves high strung.

“What do you make of it, Captain Larry?” I asked that ruddy-faced, unemotional officer, who had come to my side during the talk. “This is no course for tramps, is it? You would not expect to meet a liner so near the shore.”

“Certainly not, sir. If she were a copper ship to Port Nolloth, she wouldn’t be doing ten knots. Yonder boat’s doing fifteen.”

“And her course is due south.”

“Is due south, sir.”

“Would you be surprised to hear that she was putting in to St. Helena Bay?”

“After what you have told me, sir, nothing would surprise me. It’s wonder

enough to find any ship here at all, sir.”

I admitted it to be so. There are no more pleasing moments in our lives than those confirming the truth of some great idea which we have deduced from a certain set of circumstances. There, upon the far sea, one of the links of the chain of my conjecture stood revealed. I had been less than human if my heart had not quickened at the spectacle.

“Captain,” I said, “the men understand, I think, that our object is to find out why that ship visits St. Helena Bay, and where she is bound when she quits it? The rest I leave to you—and the engines. If our purpose is discovered, it will be immediately frustrated. I trust to your good sense that nothing of the kind shall happen.”

“Nothing of the kind will happen, sir,” he said quietly; “we are going dead slow already. Mr. Benson has his instructions.”

I listened to the beat of our powerful engines, and, as he said, they were going dead slow. Scarce a haze of smoke loomed above our ugly squat funnel. The men began to talk in low whispers, still watching the black cloud upon the horizon. That we were following a strange ship and did not wish to be discovered had been made known to them all. This in itself was sufficient to whet a seaman’s appetite for adventure; but when, on the top of it, Captain Larry called them immediately to gun drill, then, I say, they braced themselves up as true, handy men with honest work before them.

This drill we had studied together since we left Ushant behind us. It had been in my mind since the day I bought the ship of Yarrow, and stipulated for machine guns fore and aft and a fitted torpedo tube, that the aggressor might, in due time, become the aggrieved. For this I took with me no fewer than five able seamen who had served their time in the Naval Reserve and passed thence with credit. “He who treads upon a snake should wear thick boots.” The old saying had become my watchword, and not forgetting that we set out to spy upon some of the most dangerous and cunning of the world’s criminals, I made ready for that emergency.

The night would tell me the truth. Who could wonder if I waited for the night as a man for the rewards which months of dreaming had promised him?

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE NIGHT IS NOT SILENT.

#### *The Justification of Dr. Fabos.*

I dined with McShanus at eight o'clock that night and played a little piquet with him afterwards. He had now been admitted to my confidence, and knew a good deal of that which I surmised.

"'Tis your opinion, then," he had said, "that the men on yonder ship are going to receive the diamonds stolen from the mines of Africa? Man, could ye prove it, 'twould be the sensation of the universe."

I answered by reminding him of the immense value of the diamonds stolen every year from the mines of Kimberley alone. These, in spite of an astute police and a supervision passing all experience, make their way ultimately to Europe, and are trafficked in by the less scrupulous dealers. How is this to be accounted for? A similar question would ask how is it possible that stolen jewels, to the value of some millions of money or thereabouts, are hidden successfully from the world's police every year?

"Timothy," I said, "I have formed the opinion that these jewels are hidden upon the sea. This ship we are following will receive a parcel of stolen diamonds between here and St. Helena Bay. She will carry them to a larger vessel now afloat upon the Atlantic. That greater ship, could you board her, would tell you the story of many a famous robbery, show the contents of many rifled safes, enlighten you as to the whereabouts of many a great jewel now advertised for by the police. I hope that the day will come when I shall step on the deck of that ship, and that you will accompany me, Timothy. One thing I have never doubted—it is my friend's courage."

He liked the compliment, and banged the cabin table with his fist to emphasise it.

"I'd cross mountains to go aboard her," he said, with real feeling. "Don't think ill of me if I doubt 'tis a mare's nest ye are afther and that there may be disappointments. Ye said the night would tell us. Blame nobody if the night is silent, Ean, me bhoy."

"It will not be silent, Timothy. Here is Captain Larry tumbling down the companion to tell us so. He has come to say that there is a message, and that he has heard it. Now listen to him."

Honest Benjamin Larry, true son of Portsmouth despite his name, came blundering into the cabin as though the ship were afire. I had but to take one look at his bright eyes to know that he was there to justify me, and to say that the night was

eloquent.

“Doctor,” he cried, too excited almost to speak at all, “please to go up. There’s something happening.”

We raced up the ladder together—McShanus with an agility that must have spoken of his lost youth. It would have been then about ten o’clock at night—four bells of the first watch, as the seamen have it. The night was intensely dark and void of stars. A long gentle ground swell lifted the yacht lazily and rolled her as though she had been a cradle rocked by a loving hand. I perceived at once that our engines had been stopped and that we carried no lights. The African shore was hardly visible, but the thunder of distant surf said that we still hugged it. The crew themselves were all at the bows. I did not fail to notice that the machine guns were uncovered and the magazine hatch already removed.

It really was wonderful how the good fellows acted in that moment of discovery. Had they been trained upon the decks of a British man-of-war, I could have looked neither for a warmer zeal nor a finer prudence. None spoke aloud or gave tongue to the excitement which possessed him. Quietly making way for me as I came up, the great boatswain, whom they called Balaam, pointed with his fat hand at the scene which engrossed their attention, and waited for my remarks. Others nodded their heads expressively. It was as though to say, “The master is right, after all.” I could have asked no greater compliment.

And what did we see to hold us there engrossed? A low light flashing upon the water, perhaps the third of a mile from our own deck. Other lights from a steamer’s deck plainly answering the signal. A man needed to be no wizard to say that a boat had put out from some harbourage near by, and now exchanged signals with the steamer we had followed all day. But this was very far from being all, for as we stood there one of the ships suddenly turned a search-light upon the boat that came out to her, and we saw the whole picture, as in vivid radiance, cast upon the black screen of the night.

There were two vessels, as we had surmised, and one of them had the shape and the manner of a foreign-built gunboat. The other seemed to be little more than a sea-going launch, speedy and snake-like, and carrying no more than three men. We could plainly see that a rope ladder had been slung out from the apparent gunboat, and that one of the hands from the launch meant to go aboard her. A great cloud of crimson smoke above the funnel of the larger vessel denoted her preparation for a speedy voyage and the brief aspect of her call. Indeed, to be precise, she did not lie to more than fifteen minutes in all, and the man who had gone aboard her had already descended the ladder and had cast the launch off before she discovered our presence and knew that she was watched.

As a flash of light upon a dark horizon, so it happened. The quivering rays of the great lantern skimming the limpid sea as it were jestingly on the part of the man who guided them, fell for an instant upon our decks and revealed us there as a black shape threatening and undeclared. Instantly signal guns were fired from the shore; the lights were extinguished; the after darkness fell impenetrably and unrelieved

save where the crimson flame hovered above the gunboat's funnel. Then for the first time a voice spoke upon my own yacht. It was that of Captain Larry, and he uttered a truth which was plain to all.

"They're running due west, sir—to the open sea. It is as you said it would be."

"And will be afterwards, Captain Larry. Full steam ahead, if you please. We must not lose sight of them again."

"Whatever it may cost, sir?"

"It will cost nothing, captain."

To the men I said:

"Fifty pounds apiece, my lads, if you track that steamer to port."

They answered me with a ringing cheer and were at their places in an instant. *White Wings* began to race through the water with all the power of the great engines which drove her. I heard a second signal gun fired ashore, but could attach no meaning to it. There was no other light upon our horizon than that of the red loom of flame which betrayed the gunboat's course. She was our goal—and yet not she alone. The ocean had her secrets to reveal. I did not believe that she could hide them from me now.

"We have the legs of her, Captain Larry?" I asked him presently.

"Undoubtedly, sir."

"And we will be up with her in half an hour?"

"In a quarter if we hold this speed. Mr. Benson is showing off a bit, you see."

"Captain Larry," I said, "they have arms aboard for certain, and I will risk the life of no man who came to serve me in ignorance of this. Let Mr. Benson be a little more discreet. We will keep out of gunshot, if you please."

"I understand you, sir. And none too early."

He meant that we were already upon the point of being within gunshot of the pursued, and he rang down for "half-speed" as he spoke. The order was not obeyed a minute too soon. A heavy gun thundered at us presently, and a shell fell impotently into the sea not a furlong from the starboard bow. The effect of this upon my crew was such as words can express with difficulty. It may be that the scene had been unreal to them until this time; a vision of which they could make little. But powder and shot! The poorest intellect of them all understood that, while as for my genial Irishman, he ducked his head like an old woman who believes that a tile is falling.

"Ach, divil take them, Fabos! Am I wounded anywhere?"

"It would be somewhere about the pit of the stomach, Timothy."

"But 'tis shell they're firing!"

"I will complain about it, Timothy, when we go aboard."

He was very white—I forgave him for that. Like the others, he, too, had but little realised what the pursuit of this unknown ship might cost us, and what pages it might write in the story of crime. The crashing sound of a great gun ringing out in the silence of the night brought the truth to his ears as no words could have done.

"Faith, 'tis little stomach I have for it at all."

“Would you turn back, Timothy?”

“Not for a thousand sovereigns upon the cabin table.”

The men heard him and gave a great cheer. It was answered distantly from the racing gunboat, echoed again by a low sobbing sound as of winds, given back to us by a murmur of the sea, which already fretted as though at the far voice of tempest. A storm had crept upon us unseen. We had no eyes for anything but the black shape of the gunboat.

“There’s water for your soup, sir,” said the quartermaster they called Cain. “Begging your pardon for the liberty, there’s more than a capful of wind coming.”

We scarcely heard him. Captain Larry, more prudent, went down to his cabin to read the glass, and returned with a grave face.

“We shall have wind, sir, without a doubt,” he said to me.

“And what if we do, Larry?”

“Oh, the ship must tell us that.”

“I have no doubt of her. If it were only daylight, Larry——”

“Ah, sir, if our wishes were sovereigns what fairy godmothers we should make.”

“They’ve doused their lights, Larry,” I went on. “The night is their luck. We may lose them yet, but we shall find them again if we cross the Atlantic to do it.”

“May I go with you, if it’s twice round the world and back!”

Loud voices cried “Ay!” to that. The excitement of the night worked strangely upon the nerves of men who, like all sailors, were awestruck in the presence of mystery. Yonder in the trough of a black ocean was the unknown ship we had set out to seek. The darkness hid her from us, the sea rose rapidly, the wind had begun to blow half a gale. No longer could there be any thought of firing a gun or declaring an open attack upon us. Each ran for the open and for safety. Our searchlight showed us an empty waste of trembling waters and a black hull breasting the swell in cataracts of foam and spindrift. We doubted if the others would weather the night. Anxiety for our own safety became the dominant factor of our thoughts.

Looking back to that unforgotten night, I have often wondered at the folly of calculations which had taken so little thought of Nature and allowed the temper of winds so small a place in all our reckonings. I confess that such an arbiter as storm and tempest never once was in my mind when I planned to search the northern parts of Cape Colony for an unknown ship and to follow that ship to her haven in the open Atlantic. When the gale broke upon us, a swift cyclonic tempest characteristic of the southern ocean and her humour, I perceived my folly and could but laugh sardonically. So near had we been to that day of discovery of which I had dreamed! And now we were but a shell of steel tossed impotently amidst a raging cataract of sounds, swept by a hail of spray, or carried blindly at the beck of winds. The ship we pursued appeared to have been lost altogether in the darkness. It became, for any but a trained sailor, almost a dangerous thing to remain upon the deck of the *White Wings*. The crash of the seas upon our plates was as the tremor of thunder about a house.

So for the hour we had failed. And who would dare to speak with confidence of the morrow?



## CHAPTER X.

### THE VISION OF THE SHIP.

*Dr. Fabos Proposes to Visit the Azores.*

I slept a little about midnight, being convinced that the night had written the last word of its story. The storm had not abated. A wild wind blew tempestuously from the south-east, and drove us before it as a leaf before a winter's blast. Good ship as my yacht proved to be, she was like many turbinéd steamers, a wet boat in a gale and no friend to the landsman. We shipped heavy seas persistently, and drove our bull's nose wildly into mountains of seething foam. Even the hardy crew complained of her; while my poor friend Timothy McShanus implored me, for the love of God, to throw him overboard.

"Was it for this I left the home of me fathers?" he asked me pitifully when I entered the cabin where he lay. "Is this the land of milk and honey to which ye would take me? Stop the ship, I tell ye, and put me ashore. Let me die among the naygroes. Kill me with laudanum. Man, I'll thank ye to have done it. I'll call ye the best friend that Timothy McShanus ever had."

Poor fellow! His groans were in my ears when I fell to sleep. His was the voice which reproached me when I awoke. That would have been about three o'clock of the morning, I suppose. Dawn was breaking furtively in an ink-black sky. The swaying of a lamp in the gimbals, the swish of water against the cabin walls told me that the gale had somewhat abated. I asked McShanus if he had waked me, and he answered that the captain had been down to call me to the deck.

"Put Timothy McShanus ashore and let the naygroes devour him," he said; and then, almost with tears in his eyes, "Man, the last of me has been given up. I'm no more than a hollow drum for sport to bate upon. Bury me where the shamrock grows. Say 'twas the ups and downs that did for this same McShanus."

I spoke what cheer I could, and went on deck as the captain had asked me. Abel, the quartermaster, stood at the wheel, and all our officers were with Larry upon the bridge. The sea still ran high, but the wind had moderated. I perceived a sky that was black and thunderous to leeward, but clearing in the sun's path. There were wonderful lights upon the raging waters—beams of gold and grey and green interweaved and superb in their weirdness. The waves ran high, but with less power in their assault; and though a fine rain was falling, the measure of it became less with every minute that passed. These things I observed almost as I stepped from the companion hatch. But it was not until I stood side by side with Captain Larry upon the bridge that I knew why he had summoned me.

He turned as I mounted the ladder, and helped me up with an icy cold hand. The

little group there, I thought, seemed awed and afraid to speak. Larry himself merely pointed with his hand to a sailing ship sagging heavily in the swell, perhaps half a mile from our port quarter. The glass which he put into my hand helped me but little, so dense was the spray upon its lens. I could, at the first glance, make little of the spectacle save that the ship had four masts, was of unusual size, and seemed to be standing well up to the gale, although her masts were bare. For the rest, she might have been any ship you like bound from Europe to “down under,” and thence returning by Cape Horn. I told Larry as much, and then looked at the stranger again. Undoubtedly there was something queer about her. Yet what it was a landsman might well have been unable to say.

“Well, Larry, and what do you make of it now?” I asked the captain presently. Had I not known him too well, his answer would have made me doubt his sanity.

“I think she is the ship you are seeking, sir.”

I took up the glass without a word, and focussed it upon the deck of the sailing ship. Not a living soul could be discerned there. It might have been a derelict buffeted at hazard about the great Atlantic waste. And yet the vessel appeared to hold a steady course. Behind it my quick eye detected a wake of water such as is left by the propeller of a steamer. There were black objects at the bows which, in sober reason, might have been given the shape of machine guns. These things I was almost afraid to admit aloud. The idea that came to me had been purchased at a heavy price. I felt that I could share it with none.

“She is a sailing ship, Larry,” I said, “and yet not a sailing ship.”

“Far from it, sir. Yon’s no sailing ship.”

“You are thinking that she is fitted with auxiliary steam?”

“I am thinking that she has enough arms on board to serve a cruiser of the line. Machine guns fore and aft and big stuff amidships. The masts are all blarney, sir, or I’m a Dutchman. That vessel’s heavily engined, and we may thank God we’re the fastest yacht afloat. If there were less sea running they would have fired at us already.”

“You mean it, Larry?”

“As true as there’s blue sky above, sir, yonder ship will sink us if we stand by. I’m telling you what I see with an old sailor’s eyes. Ten minutes ago, we came on her suddenly out of the mists. She had fifty men on her poop then, and one dead man she put overboard. The sound of a gun they were firing called my attention to her. I saw a group of hands on the quarter-deck, and one shot down in cold blood. They put him overboard and then discovered us. What happens then? The men go out of sight like so many spiders to their webs. The ship is navigated, heaven knows how. She keeps by us, and wants to know our business. I signal to them and no man answers. What shall I make of that, sir?”

I answered him without a moment’s hesitation.

“You will make full speed ahead, Larry—now, this instant, let the yacht do what she can.”

He rang the order down to the engineers, and *White Wings* began to race as a

human thing over the great seas which swept upward toward the equator. The words were not spoken a moment too soon. Even as the bells rang out, a shell came hurtling after us from the great gun Larry's clever eyes had discerned upon the deck of the unknown vessel. It fell far ahead of us—a reckless, unmeaning threat, and yet one which Fate ironically might have turned to our destruction. A second and a third followed it. We stood as though spell-bound, the spindrift half blinding us, the monster seas surging upon our decks in cataracts of clear water. Would they hit us, or should we be lost in the curtain of the storm? I claim no better courage in that moment of the ordeal than the good fellows who closed about me were so ready to display. We raced from death together, and numbered the minutes which stood between us and our salvation. No thought or deed of our own could help us. The good yacht alone would answer for our lives.

Now, this strange pursuit lasted, I suppose, a full ten minutes. That it came to a premature end must be set down to the immense speed of which the *White Wings* was capable, and the force of the gale which still raged about us. We had, indeed, now caught the tail end of the hurricane, the outer edge of the storm cycle; and immediately it enveloped us, a darkness as of intensest night came down upon the waters. Turbulent waves, foaming and angry at their crests, deeply hollowed and black below, rolled northward in monster seas of towering grandeur, each threatening us with the menace of disaster, but passing impotently as we rose at its approach and were hurled onward to the depths. The sound of the rushing wind became terrible to hear. Unseen armies of the ether clashed and thundered above our heads. The rain of the spindrift cut our faces as with a whip. We held a course with difficulty, and must instantly have been lost to the view of those upon the pursuing ship.

A full hour elapsed, I suppose, before the storm spent itself. Swiftly as it had come upon us, so swiftly it passed, leaving an aftermath of glorious sunshine and sweet, clear air, and a sea deliciously green and fresh. Not a trace of any other ship could we now espy upon the horizon. We steamed the hither ocean alone, and the memory of the night was as that of a vision moribund, of sights and sounds of sleep to be mocked and forgotten at the dawn. So reason would have had it, but reason is rarely a sailor's friend. If my men had made nothing of the unknown ships, of the shell they had fired, and the deeper mysteries they spoke of, none the less I knew that the fo'castle would resound presently with the talk of it, and that even my officers would recount that strange experience by many a fireside yet unbuilt. For myself, my duty had become plain to me. Until I had set foot upon the deck of the *Diamond Ship* (for this I called her henceforth) I had no place ashore, nor must think of my leisure at all. A man apart, I did not shrink from that lonely vigil. The mystery of it beckoned me, the excitement challenged my intellect to such a combat as the mind must love. I would go on to the end, and no man should turn me from my purpose.

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Now, our course had been Northward during these exciting hours; but as the day wore on, we set it full N.N.W. Captain Larry alone upon the ship knew my determination to sail from the African coast to Santa Maria in the Azores. I gave him no reason, nor did he ask one. He understood that my purpose was worthy of him and the yacht, and obeyed me unquestioningly. As for the men, they had been engaged for a service which they knew to have some measure of risk in it. A scale of pay beyond anything expected from the master of a yacht tempered their criticism and rewarded their fidelity. This I will say for them, that they were seamen, brave beyond the common, from the burly boatswain Balaam to the beef-faced cabin boy we had christened Nimbles. If they called my ship “a police boat,” I did not resent the term. I think that they had come to have some affection and respect for me; and I would have wagered my fortune upon their loyalty. To such men it mattered little whether our head lay to the North or to the South. The mystery held their interest; they admitted that they had never known brighter days at sea.

There remained my poor Timothy McShanus. Good soul, how his heart warmed to the sunshine! And who would have hailed the Timothy of storm and of tempest when upon the second night of our Northward voyage he dressed himself to dine with me in the exquisite little saloon my builders had designed for the *White Wings*? The sea had ebbed down by this time to the stillness of a great inland lake. The moonbeams upon the sleeping water shone with an ethereal radiance of light filtered as it were in a mesh of mirrors. Scarce a breath of wind stirred the awnings of the deck or was caught by the gaping cowls. The yacht moved with that odd gliding motion a turbine engine ensures. We appeared to be running over the unctuous swell as a car upon well-laid rails. The sounds of the night were of steam hissing and valves at a suction and shafts swiftly revolving. The decks trembled at the voice of speed; the movement of the vessel was that of a living, breathing entity, pitted against the majesty of spaces and conquering them.

Be sure that Timothy McShanus came in to dinner on such a night as this. He had found his sea-legs and his appetite, and soup, fish, and bird disappeared like one o'clock. To watch him drink '89 Bollinger from a Venetian tumbler might have inspired even the gods to thirst. Groomed to the last hair upon a time-worn scalp, Timothy would have served well for the model of an Englishman of the 'sixties as Paris used to see him.

“By the holy soul of Christopher Columbus, 'tis a rare seaman I am,” he said, as we went up above to take our coffee and cigars under the shelter of the awning. “Ask me to point out the terrestrial paradise, and the yacht *White Wings* will I name to ye. Ah, don't talk to me of yesterday. 'Twas a bit of the touch of neuralgia I had, and keeping to me bed for security.”

“You wanted them to throw you overboard, Timothy.”

“The divil I did—and phwat for, if not to lighten the ship in the storm? 'Tis a Jonah I would be, and three days in the belly of the whale. Man, 'twould make a taytotaler of Bacchus himself.”

He lighted a cigar of prodigious length, and fell for a while to practical

observations upon the sea and sky and the ship which were of interest to none but himself. By-and-bye they would appear in the columns of the *Daily Shuffler*. I begged of him to be less Dantesque and more practical, and presently, becoming quite serious, he spoke of the Diamond Ship.

“Phwat the blazes does it all mean, Ean me bhoy? A ship in such a hurry that she fires a shot at ye for looking at her. Larry has told me the story, and, by me sowl, ’tis astonishing. When I return to London next month——”

“You are contemplating a return then, Timothy?”

“Faith, would ye have so much ganius buried in the Doldrums?”

“We shall have to pick up a liner and put you aboard,” said I.

He set his cup down with a bang and looked at me as though I had done him an injury.

“’Tis to the British Isles ye are bound. Would ye deny it?”

“I do deny it, Timothy. We are bound to the Island of Santa Maria in the Azores.”

“For phwat the divil——”

But this masterly sentence he never finished. I could see that he was thinking deeply. Presently he settled himself in his chair and began to talk almost as one communing with himself.

“He takes me from London, me that is an orphan and has buried three wives. He puts me on the sea and shows me a wild man’s country. Ach, ’tis a wonderful man, me friend Fabos, and none like unto him. As a lamb to the shearing do I thread in his footsteps.”

“Rather an old sheep, Timothy, is it not?”

He brushed the objection aside, and apostrophising the stars in that grandiose style he had learned from ancient melodrama, he exclaimed:

“Woman eternal, the crimes that are committed in your name.”

“Do you mean to say——”

“I mean to say that ye are going to the Azores to see her.”

“Joan Fordibras?”

“No other. Joan Fordibras. The little divil of a shepherdess in the red dress. Ye are going to see her. Deny it not. Ye are risking much to see her—your duty which bought ye this ship, the knowledge ye have learned out of Africa, the story ye would tell to the British Government. Ye are losing these because of the shepherdess. I’ll deny it, Ean Fabos, when ye tell me it is not true.”

“Then deny it now, Timothy. I am going to the Azores because I believe that a house there can finish the story which the sea has begun. That is the whole truth of it. There are men afloat in a ship, Timothy, who hide some of the world’s greatest criminals and their plunder from the police of all cities. That is what I had supposed, and this voyage has gratified my supposition. I am going to the Azores to meet some of these men face to face——”

“And Joan Fordibras?”

“I hope from my heart that I shall never see her again.”

“Ye hope nothing of the kind, man. ’Tis lurking in yer heart the thought that ye will see and save her. I honour ye for it. I would not turn ye from your purpose for a fortune upon the table, poor divil of a man that I am. Go where ye will, Ean Fabos, there’s one that will go with ye to the world’s end and back again and say that friendship sent him.”

“Then I am not to put you on a liner, Timothy?”

“May that same ship rot on verdurous reefs.”

“But you are risking your life, man.”

He stood up and flicked the ash of his cigar into the sea.

“Yon is life,” he said, “a little red light in the houses of our pleasure, and then the ashes on the waters. Ean, me bhoy, I go with you to Santa Maria——”

We smoked awhile in silence. Presently he asked me how I came to think of the Azores at all, and why I expected to find Joan Fordibras upon the island of Santa Maria.

“Did she speak of it at Dieppe, by any chance?” he asked me.

“Not a word,” said I.

“General Fordibras would have let it slip?”

“Nothing of the kind.”

“Then, how the blazes——?”

“Timothy,” I said, “when we dined with Joan Fordibras at Dieppe, her chaperone, the elderly but engaging Miss Aston, carried a letter in her hand.”

“Indade, and she did.”

“I saw the stamp upon it, Timothy.”

He raised his eyes to heaven.

“God save all wicked men from Ean Fabos,” he exclaimed.

But I had only told him the truth, and but for that letter the lady carried, the high seas might yet embosom the secret of the Diamond Ship.

## CHAPTER XI.

### DEAD MAN'S RAFT.

#### *The Voyage to the Azores and an Episode.*

So the desire of every man on board the *White Wings* became that of making the port of Santa Maria without the loss of a single day. When our prudent Captain insisted that we must call at Porto Grande to coal, I believe that we regarded him as guilty of an offence against our earnestness. The fever of the quest had infected the very firemen in the stoke-hold. My men spent the sunny days peering Northward as though the sea would disclose to them sights and sounds beyond all belief wonderful. They would have burned their beds if by such an act the course had been held.

For my own part, while the zeal flattered me, there were hours of great despondency and, upon that, of silent doubt which no optimism of others could atone for. Reflect how ill-matched were the links in the chain I had forged and how little to be relied upon. A dead man upon a lonely shore; a woman wearing my stolen pearls in a London ball-room; the just belief that diamonds smuggled from the mines of South Africa were hidden upon the high seas; the discovery of a great ship, drifting like a phantom derelict in the waste of the South Atlantic Ocean! This was the record. If I judged that the island of Santa Maria could add to it, the belief was purely supposititious. I went there as a man goes to an address which may help him in a quest. He may find the house empty or tenanted, hostile or friendly; but, in any case, he is wise to go and to answer the question for himself, for no other can take the full measure of that responsibility.

We were delayed awhile at Porto Grande waiting for coal, and after that, sparing our engines as much as possible, we set a drowsy course almost due North, and upon the third day we were within fifty miles of that island of our hopes—Santa Maria in the Azores. I am not likely to forget either the occasion or the circumstance of it. The month was November, the hour eleven o'clock in the forenoon watch, the morning that of Saturday, the nineteenth day of the month. Despite the season of the year, a warm sun shone down upon us almost with tropic heat. Captain Larry was in his cabin preparing for the mid-day observation; the quartermaster Cain was at the wheel; Balaam, the boatswain, sat against the bulwarks amidships, knitting a scarf for his throat; my virile friend, McShanus, had gone below to "soak in the cold water," as he put it. My own occupation was that of reading for the third time that very beautiful book—Maeterlinck's "Life of the Bee," and I was wondering anew at the master knowledge of Nature it displayed when the second officer sent down word from the bridge that he would like to speak with me. Understanding that he did

not wish to call the Captain from the cabin, I went up immediately and discovered him not a little excited about a black object drifting with the wind at a distance, it may be, of a third of a mile from the ship. This he pointed out to me, and handing me the glass, he asked me what I made of it.

“It’s a raft, Andrews,” I said—for that was the second officer’s name—“a raft, and there are men upon it.”

“Exactly as I thought, sir. It is a raft, and there are men upon it—but not living men, I fear. I have been watching it for a good ten minutes, and I am sure of what I say. Yon poor fellows will never sail a ship again.”

I lifted the glass again and spied out the raft with a new interest. Clearly, it was not a safety raft such as is carried by most steamships nowadays; indeed, it appeared to be a very rude structure made of rough planks lashed together at hazard. So far as I could count them, there were seven bodies made fast by ropes to this uncouth structure, but the seas broke over them continually, and I waited some moments before I observed that the clothes of the men were but rags, and that two of the poor fellows at least were almost entirely immersed and must have been drowned as we looked at them, if their deaths had not occurred long weeks ago.

“That’s a fearful thing, Andrews,” I exclaimed, returning him the glass. “Of course, we shall go and see what we can do.”

“I have already altered the course two points, sir,” he said.

“Will you send a boat, do you think?”

“Ah, sir, that’s for you to say. If you think it wise that the men should know, remembering what a sailor is, then a boat by all means.”

“That is to be considered. If these poor fellows are really dead——”

“They have been dead many weeks, sir. What’s more, no shipwreck put them in that position.”

“Good God! Do you mean to say that they have been murdered!”

“Ah, that’s not for me to decide, Dr. Fabos. Look at the way they are lashed aboard there. Did their own hands do that? I’ll wager all I’ve got against it. They were tied up like that and then sent adrift. It’s plain enough without the glass, and the glass makes it sure.”

Be it said that we were steaming some fifteen knots an hour by this time, and had come almost within a biscuit toss of the raft. The forward look-out had been warned to say nothing, and Abel, the quartermaster, took his cue from the officer of the watch. So it came about that we passed by the dreadful spectacle and remained as a crew almost ignorant of it. Indeed, knowing how easily seamen are depressed, I was thankful that it should have been so. The poor fellows upon the raft must have been dead for some weeks. Two of them were little more than human skeletons. The others were washed by every wave that broke over the hellish contrivance of ropes and planks to which they had been tied. I doubted no longer my officer’s supposition, horrible as it was to believe. Neither peril of the sea nor accident of destiny had sent those men to a death unnameable. I knew that they had been foully murdered, and that he who had thus dealt with them was the man I had set out to



seek.

“We cannot help them, Andrews,” I exclaimed. “Let us keep our secret. The day may not be distant when the man shall share it with me. It would be something to have lived for—even to avenge that!”

Hardly could he answer me. Terror of the voyage, and upon terror a fierce delight, had rapidly become the guiding impulses of my crew. They would have sailed with me to the world’s end now, and made no complaint. It remained for me, I said, not to betray them, even for the sake of a woman worthy of a man’s love.

## CHAPTER XII.

### SANTA MARIA.

*Dr. Fabos leaves the Yacht "White Wings."*

You should know that Santa Maria is an island of the Azores group standing at the extreme south-east of the Archipelago and being some thirty-eight square miles in extent. Its harbour, if such it can be called, is at Villa do Porto, where there is a pleasant, if puny, town, and a little colony of prosperous Portuguese merchants. Of anchorage for ships of considerable burden there is none worth speaking of. Those who ship goods to the island send them first to the neighbouring port of St. Michaels, whence they are transferred in small boats to Villa do Porto. The land is spoken of as very fertile and rich in wheat-growing soil. So much I learnt from the books before I visited it. That which my own eyes showed me I will here set down.

Now, we had always intended to make Santa Maria after sundown, and it was quite dark when we espied the island's lights, shining over the water like the lanterns of a fishing fleet. A kindly breeze blew at that time from the south-west, and little sea was running. As we drew near to the land, the silence of an unspoken curiosity fell upon the men. Some whisper of talk had gone about that the "Master" would land at Villa do Porto, and that only the Japanese, Okyada, would accompany him. I knew that the good fellows were itching to speak out and to say that they believed me to be little less than a madman. So much had already been intimated by honest McShanus, and had been answered in the cabin below.

"Fabos, ye have more wits than the common, and I'll believe no fool's tale of ye," he had said. "Good God, if your own story is true, ye'd be safer in a lion's den than in yon menagerie of thieves. What's to forbid the men accompanying ye? 'Tis my society that may be disagreeable to ye, perhaps. Faith, I want no man to insult me twice, nor will I stop in the yacht of the one who does so, though it were as big as Buckingham Palace and the Horse Guards thrown in."

I clapped him kindly on the shoulder and told him not to be a fool. If I asked him to remain on board the *White Wings*, that was for my safety's sake.

"Timothy," I said, "your coat is picturesque, but I refuse to tread upon the tail of it. Don't be a choleric ass. And understand, man, that as long as the yacht stands out to sea and has my good friends aboard, I am as safe as your maiden aunt in a four-wheeled cab. Let any harm come to me, and you know what you are to do. This ship will carry you straight to Gibraltar, where you will deliver my letters to Admiral Harris and act thereafter as he shall tell you. I do not suppose that there will be the slightest necessity for anything of the kind. These people are always cowards. I have a strong card to play, and it will be played directly I go ashore. Be quite easy about

me, Timothy. I am in no hurry to get out of this world, and if I thought that by going ashore yonder my departure would be hastened, not all the men in Europe would persuade me to the course.”

“And that’s to say nothing of the other sex,” he rejoined a little savagely. “Now, don’t you know that Joan Fordibras is ashore there?”

“I think it very unlikely, Timothy.”

“Ah, to blazes with the pretty face of her! When shall we have the news of you?”

“Every day at sundown. Let the pinnace be at the mole. If not that, stand off for a signal. We will arrange it to-morrow night. You shall come ashore and dine with me when I know how the land lies. To-night I must go alone, old friend.”

He assented with great reluctance. The men had already manned the lifeboat and were waiting for me. We lay, perhaps, a full mile from the port, and had no pilot other than the Admiralty chart; but the kindness of the night befriended us, and when the half of an hour had passed, I stood safe and well in the streets of Villa do Porto and my Japanese servant was at my side. This would have been about the hour of nine o’clock. Such life as the little place can show was then at its height, and I confess not without its charm. Had I been asked to describe the scene, I would have said that it reminded me not a little of the Italian lakes. Shrubs and trees and flowers before the houses spoke in their turn of the tropics; the air was heavy with the perfume of a Southern garden; the atmosphere moist and penetrating, but always warm. Knowing absolutely nothing of the place, I turned to an officer of the Customs for guidance. Where was the best hotel, and how did one reach it? His answer astonished me beyond all expectation.

“The best hotel, señor,” he said, “is the Villa San Jorge. Am I wrong in supposing that you are the Englishman for whom General Fordibras is waiting?”

I concealed my amazement with what skill I could, and said that I was delighted to hear that General Fordibras had returned from Europe. If the intimation alarmed me, I would not admit as much to myself. These people, then, knew of my movements since I had quitted Dieppe? They expected me to visit Santa Maria! And this was as much as to say that Joan Fordibras had been their instrument, though whether a willing or an unconscious instrument I could not yet determine. The night would show me—the night whose unknown fortunes I had resolved to confront, let the penalty be what it might.

“I will go up to the Villa at once,” I said to the Customs officer. “If a carriage is to be had, let them get it ready without loss of time.”

He replied that the Villa San Jorge lay five miles from the town, on the slope of the one inconsiderable mountain which is the pride of the island of Santa Maria. It would be necessary to ride, and the General had sent horses. He trusted that I would bring my servants, as they would be no embarrassment to his household. The cordiality of the message, indeed, betrayed an anxiety which carried its own warning. I was expected at the house and my host was in a hurry. Nothing could be more ominous.

“Does the General have many visitors from Europe?” I asked the officer.

“A great many sometimes,” was the reply; “but he is not always here, señor. There are months together when we do not see him—so much the worse for us.”

“Ah! a benefactor to the town, I see.”

“A generous, princely gentleman, Excellency—and his daughter quite a little queen amongst us.”

“Is she now at the Villa San Jorge?”

“She arrived from Europe three days ago, Excellency.”

I had nothing more to ask, and without the loss of a moment I delivered my dressing-bag to the negro servant who approached me in the General’s name, and mounted the horse which a smart French groom led up to me. Okyada, my servant, being equally well cared for, we set off presently from the town, a little company, it may be, of a dozen men, and began to ride upward toward the mountains. A less suspicious man, one less given to remark every circumstance, however trivial, would have found the scene entirely delightful. The wild, tortuous mountain path, the clear sky above, the glittering rocks becoming peaks and domes of gold in the moonbeams, the waving torches carried by negroes, Portuguese, mulattoes, men of many nationalities who sang a haunting native chant as they went—here, truly, was the mask of romance if not its true circumstance. But I had eyes rather for the men themselves, for the arms they carried, the ugly knives, the revolvers that I detected in the holsters. Against what perils of that simple island life were these weapons intended? Should I say that these men were assassins, and that I had been decoyed to the island to be the subject of a vulgar and grotesquely imprudent crime? I did not believe it. The anchor light of the *White Wings*, shining across the water, stood for my salvation. These men dare not murder me, I said. I could have laughed aloud at their display of impotent force.

I say that we followed a dangerous path up the hillside; but anon this opened out somewhat, and having crossed a modern bridge of iron above a considerable chasm, the forbidding walls of which the torches showed me very plainly—having passed thereby, we found ourselves upon a plateau, the third of a mile across, perhaps, and having for its background the great peak of the mountain itself. How the land went upon the seaward side I could not make out in the darkness; but no sooner had we passed the gates than I observed the lights of a house shining very pleasantly across the park; and from the cries the men raised, the hastening paces of the horses, and the ensuing hubbub, I knew that we had reached our destination, and that this was the home of General Fordibras.

Five minutes later, the barking of hounds, the sudden flash of light from an open door, and a figure in the shadows gave us welcome to the Villa San Jorge. I dismounted from my horse and found myself face to face, not with Hubert Fordibras, but with his daughter Joan.

She was prettily dressed in a young girl’s gown of white, but one that evidently had been built in Paris. I observed that she wore no jewellery, and that her manner was as natural and simple as I might have hoped it to be. A little shyly, she told me

that her father had been called to the neighbouring island of St. Michaels, and might not return for three days.

“And isn’t it just awful?” she said, the American phrase coming prettily enough from her young lips. “Isn’t it awful to think that I shall have to entertain you all that long while?”

I answered her that if my visit were an embarrassment, I could return to the yacht immediately—that I had come to see her father, and that my time was my own. To all of which she replied with one of those expressive and girlish gestures which had first attracted me toward her—just an imperceptible shrug of the shoulders and a pretty pout of protest.

“Why, if you would like to go back, Dr. Fabos——”

“Don’t say so. I am only thinking of your troubles.”

“Then, you do want to stay?”

“Frankly, I want to stay.”

“Then come right in. And pity our poor cook, who expected you an hour ago.”

“Really, you should not——”

“What! starve a man who has come all the way from Europe to see us?”

“Well, I’ll confess to a mountain appetite, then. You can tell the General how obedient you found me.”

“You shall tell him for yourself. Oh, don’t think you are going away from him in a hurry. People never do who come to the Villa San Jorge. They stop weeks and months. It’s just like heaven, you know—if you know what heaven is like. We have given you ‘Bluebeard’s room,’ because of the cupboard in it—but you may look inside if you like. Let General Washington show you the way up this minute.”

“And my servant? I hope he won’t give any trouble. He’s a Jap, and he lives on rice puddings. If he is in your way, don’t hesitate to say so.”

“How could he be in the way? Besides, my father quite expected him.”

“He said so?”

“Yes, and an Irish gentleman—what was his name? The one who made love to Miss Aston at Dieppe. She’s upstairs now, reading about the Kings of Ireland. The Irish gentleman told her of the book. Why, Dr. Fabos, as if you didn’t know! Of course, he made love to her.”

“In an Irish way, I hope. Perhaps we’ll have him ashore to-morrow—though I fear he will be a disappointment. His lovemaking consists largely of quotations from his stories in *Pretty Bits*. I have heard him so often. There are at least two hundred women in the world who are the only women he has ever loved. Put not your faith in Timothy—at least, beg of Miss Aston to remember that he comes of a chivalrous but susceptible race.”

“How dare I intrude upon her dream of happiness? She has already furnished the drawing-room—in imagination, you know.”

“Then let her dream that Timothy has upset the lamp, and that the house is on fire.”

We laughed together at the absurdity of it, and then I followed a huge mulatto,

whom she called General Washington, upstairs to a room they had prepared for me. The house, as much as I could see of it, appeared to be a bungalow of considerable size, but a bungalow which splayed out at its rear into a more substantial building carrying an upper storey and many bedrooms there. My own room was furnished in excellent taste, but without display. The American fashion of a bathroom adjoining the bedroom had been followed, and not a bathroom alone, but a delightful little sitting-room completed a luxurious suite. Particularly did I admire the dainty painting of the walls (little paper being used at Santa Maria by reason of the damp), the old English chintz curtains, and the provision of books both in the sitting and bedroom. Very welcome also were the many portable electric lamps cunningly placed by the bedside and upon dainty Louis XV. tables; while the fire reminded me of an English country house and of the comfort looked for there.

In such a pretty bedroom I made a hasty change, and hearing musical bells below announcing that supper was ready, I returned to the hall where Joan Fordibras awaited me. The dining-room of the Villa San Jorge had the modern characteristics which distinguished the upper chambers. There were well-known pictures here, and old Sheffield plate upon the buffet. The chairs were American, and a little out of harmony with some fine Spanish mahogany and a heavy Persian carpet over the parquet. This jarring note, however, did not detract from the general air of comfort pervading the apartment, nor from its appearance of being the daily living room of a homely family. Indeed, had one chosen to name the straight-backed Miss Aston for its mistress and Joan Fordibras for the daughter of the house, then the delusion was complete and to be welcomed. None the less could I tell myself that it might harbour at that very moment some of the greatest villains that Europe had known, and that the morrow might report my own conversation to them. Never for one instant could I put this thought from me. It went with me from the hall to the table. It embarrassed me while I discussed New York and Paris and Vienna with the "learned woman" basely called the chaperone; it touched the shoulder of my mind when Joan Fordibras's eyes—those Eastern languorous eyes—were turned upon me, and her child's voice whispered some nonsense in my ears. A house of criminals and the greatest receiver in the story of crime for one of its masters! So I believed then. So, to-day, I know that the truth stood.

Our talk at the table was altogether of frivolous things. Not by so much as a look did Mistress Joan recall to me the conversation, intimate and outspoken, which had passed between us at Dieppe. I might have been the veriest dreamer to remember it all—the half-expressed plea for pity on her part, the doubt upon mine. How could one believe it of this little coquette, prattling of the theatres of Paris, the shops of Vienna, or the famous Sherry's of New York. Had we been a supper party at the Savoy, the occasion could not have been celebrated with greater levity. Of the people's history, I learned absolutely nothing at all that I did not know already. They had a house on the banks of the Hudson River, an apartment in Paris; in London they always stayed at hotels. General Fordibras was devoted to his yacht. Miss Aston adored Jane Austen, and considered the Imperial Theatre to be the

Mecca of all good American ladies. Nonsense, I say, and chiefly immaterial nonsense. But two facts came to me which I cared to make a note of. The first of them dealt with Joan Fordibras's departure from Dieppe and her arrival at Santa Maria.

"My, I was cross," she exclaimed *à propos*, "just to think that one might have gone on to Aix!"

"Then you left Dieppe in a hurry?" I commented.

She replied quite unsuspectingly:

"They shot us into the yacht like an expressed trunk. I was in such a temper that I tore my lace dress all to pieces on the something or other. Miss Aston, she looked daggers. I don't know just how daggers look, but she looked them. The Captain said he wouldn't have to blow the siren if she would only speak up."

"My dear Joan, whatever are you saying? Captain Doubleday would never so forget himself. He sent roses to my cabin directly I went on board."

"Because he wanted you to help navigate the ship, cousin. He said you were a born seaman. Now, when I go back to London——"

"Are you returning this winter?" I asked with as much indifference as I could command. She shook her head sadly.

"We never know where my father is going. It's always rush and hurry except when we are here at Santa Maria. And there's no one but the parish priest to flirt with. I tried so hard when we first came here—such a funny little yellow man, just like a monkey. My heart was half broken when Cousin Emma cut me out."

"Cousin Emma"—by whom she indicated the masculine Miss Aston—protested loudly for the second time, and again the talk reverted to Europe. I, however, had two facts which I entered in my notebook directly I went upstairs. And this is the entry that I made:

"(1) Joan Fordibras left Dieppe at a moment's notice. Ergo, her departure was the direct issue of my own.

"(2) The General's yacht put out to sea, but returned when I had left. Ergo, his was not the yacht which I had followed to South Africa."

These facts, I say, were entered in my book when I had said good-night to Joan, and left her at the stair's foot—a merry, childish figure, with mischief in her eyes and goodwill toward me in her words. Whatever purpose had been in the General's mind when he brought her to Santa Maria, she, I was convinced, knew nothing of it. To me, however, the story was as clear as though it had been written in a master book.

"They hope that I will fall in love with her and become one of them," I said. Such an idea was worthy of the men and their undertaking. I foresaw ripe fruit of it, and chiefly my own salvation and safety for some days at least.

Willingly would I play a lover's part if need be. "It should not be difficult," I said, "to call Joan Fordibras my own, or to tell her those eternal stories of love and homage of which no woman has yet grown weary!"

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE CAVE IN THE MOUNTAIN.

*Dr. Fabos Makes Himself Acquainted with the Villa San Jorge.*

Joan had spoken of a Bluebeard's cupboard in my bedroom. This I opened the moment I went up to bed. It stood against the outer wall of the room, and plainly led to some apartment or gallery above. The lock of the inner door, I perceived, had a rude contrivance of wires attached to it. A child would have read it for an ancient alarm set there to ring a bell if the door were opened. I laughed at his simplicity, and said that, after all, General Fordibras could not be a very formidable antagonist. He wished to see how far my curiosity would carry me in his house, and here was an infantile device to discover me. I took a second glance at it, and dismissed it from my mind.

I had gone up to bed at twelve o'clock, I suppose, and it was now nearly half an hour after midnight. A good fire of logs still burned in the grate, a hand lamp with a crimson shade stood near by my bed. Setting this so that I could cast a shadow out upon the verandah, I made those brisk movements which a person watching without might have interpreted as the act of undressing, and then, extinguishing the light and screening the fire, I listened for the footsteps of my servant, Okyada. No cat could tread as softly as he; no Indian upon a trail could step with more cunning than this soft-eyed, devoted, priceless fellow. I had told him to come to me at a quarter to one, and the hands of the watch were still upon the figures when the door opened inch by inch, and he appeared, a spectre almost invisible, a pair of glistening eyes, of white laughing teeth—Okyada, the invincible, the uncorruptible.

“What news, Okyada?”

He whispered his answer, every word sounding as clearly in my ears as the notes of a bell across a drowsy river.

“There is that which you should know, master. He is here, in this house. I have seen him sleeping. Let us go together—the white foot upon the wool. It would be dangerous to sleep, master.”

I thought that his manner was curiously anxious, for here was a servant who feared nothing under heaven. To question him further, when I could ascertain the facts for myself, would have been ridiculous; and merely looking to my pistols and drawing a heavy pair of felt slippers over my boots, I followed him from the room.

“Straight down the stairs, master,” he said; “they are watching the corridors. One will not watch again to-night—I have killed him. Let us pass where he should have been.”

I understood that he had dealt with one of the sentries as only a son of



Hiroshima could, and, nodding in answer, I followed him down the stairs and so to the dining-room I had so recently quitted. The apartment was almost as I had left it an hour ago. Plates and glasses were still upon the table; the embers of a fire reddened upon the open hearth. I observed, however, that a shutter of a window giving upon the verandah had been opened to the extent of a hand's-breadth, and by this window it was plain that my servant meant to pass out. No sooner had we done so than he dexterously closed the shutter behind him by the aid of a cord and a little beeswax; and having left all to his satisfaction, he beckoned me onward and began to tread a wide lawn of grass, and after that, a pine-wood, so thickly planted that an artificial maze could not have been more perplexing.

Now it came to me that the house itself did not contain the man I was seeking nor the sights which Okyada had to show me. This woodland path led to the wall of the mountain, to the foot of that high peak visible to every ship that sails by Santa Maria. Here, apparently, the track terminated. Okyada, crouching like a panther, bade me imitate him as we drew near to the rock; and approaching it with infinite caution, he raised his hand again and showed me, at the cliff's foot, the dead body of the sentinel who had watched the place, I made sure, not a full hour ago.

"We met upon the ladder, master," said my servant, unmoved. "I could not go by. He fell, master—he fell from up yonder where you see the fires. His friends are there; we are going to them."

I shuddered at the spectacle—perhaps was unnerved by it. This instant brought home to me as nothing else had done the nature of the quest I had embarked upon and the price which it might be necessary to pay for success. What was life or death to this criminal company my imagination had placed upon the high seas and on such shores as this! They would kill me, if my death could contribute to their safety, as readily as a man crushes a fly that settles by his hand. All my best reasoned schemes might not avail against such a sudden outbreak of anger and reproach as discovery might bring upon me. This I had been a fool not to remember, and it came to me in all its black nakedness as I stood at the foot of the precipice and perceived that Okyada would have me mount. The venture was as desperate as any a man could embark upon. I know not to this day why I obeyed my servant.

Let me make the situation clear. The path through the wood had carried us to a precipice of the mountain, black and stern and forbidding. Against this a frail iron ladder had been raised and hooked to the rock by the ordinary clamps which steeplejacks employ. How far this ladder had been reared, I could not clearly see. Its thread-like shell disappeared and was quickly lost in the shadows of the heights; while far above, beyond a space of blackness, a glow of warm light radiated from time to time from some orifice of the rock, and spoke both of human presence and human activities. That the ladder had been closely watched, Okyada had already told me. Did I need a further witness, the dead body at the cliff's foot must have answered for my servant's veracity. Somewhere in that tremendous haze of light and shadow the two men had met upon a foothold terrible to contemplate; their arms had been locked together; they had uttered no cries, but silently, grimly fighting,

they had decided the issue, and one had fallen horribly to the rocks below. This man's absence must presently be discovered. How if discovery came while we were still upon the ladder from which he had been hurled? Such a thought, I reflected, was the refuge of a coward. I would consider it no more, and bidding Okyada lead, I hastened to follow him to the unknown.

We mounted swiftly, the felt upon our shoes deadening all sounds. I am an old Alpine climber, and the height had no terrors for me. Under other circumstances, the fresh bracing air above the wood, the superb panorama of land and sea would have delighted me. Down yonder to the left lay Villa do Porto. The anchor-light of my own yacht shone brightly across the still sea, as though telling me that my friends were near. The Villa San Jorge itself was just a black shape below us, lightless and apparently deserted. I say "apparently," for a second glance at it showed me, as moving shadows upon a moonlit path, the figures of the sentinels who had been posted at its doors. These, had their eyes been prepared, must certainly have discovered us. It may be that they named us for the guardian of the ladder itself; it may be that they held their peace deliberately. That fact does not concern me. I am merely to record the circumstance that, after weary climbing, we reached a gallery of the rock and stood together, master and servant, upon a rude bridle-path, thirty inches wide, perhaps, and without defence against the terrible precipice it bordered. Here, as in the wood, Okyada crept apace, but with infinite caution, following the path round the mountain for nearly a quarter of a mile, and so bringing me without warning to an open plateau with a great orifice, in shape neither more nor less than the entrance to a cave within the mountain itself. I perceived that we had come to our journey's end, and falling prone at a signal from my guide, I lay without word or movement for many minutes together.

Now, there were two men keeping guard at the entrance to the cave, and we lay, perhaps, within fifty yards of them. The light by which we saw the men was that which escaped from the orifice itself—a fierce, glowing, red light, shining at intervals as though a furnace door had been opened and immediately shut again. The effect of this I found weird and menacing beyond all experience; for while at one moment the darkness of ultimate night hid all things from our view, at the next the figures were outstanding in a fiery aureole, as clearly silhouetted in crimson as though incarnadined in a shadowgraph. To these strange sights, the accompaniment of odd sounds was added—the blast as of wind from a mighty bellows, the clanging of hammers upon anvils of steel, the low humming voices of men who sang, bare-armed, as they worked. In my own country, upon another scene, a listener would have said these were honest smiths pursuing their calling while other men slept. I knew too much of the truth to permit myself any delusion. These men worked gold, I said. There could be no other employment for them.

So with me shall my friends watch upon the mountain and share both the surprise and the wonder of this surpassing discovery. My own feelings are scarcely to be declared. The night promised to justify me beyond all hope; and yet, until I could witness the thing for myself, justification lay as far off as ever. Indeed, our

position was perilous beyond all words to tell. There, not fifty paces from us, the sentries lounged in talk, revolvers in their belts, and rifles about their shoulders. A sigh might have betrayed us. We did not dare to exchange a monosyllable or lift a hand. Cramped almost beyond endurance, I, myself, would have withdrawn and gone down to the house again but for the immovable Okyada, who lay as a stone upon the path, and by his very stillness betrayed some subtler purpose. To him it had occurred that the sentries would go upon their patrol presently. I knew that it might be so, had thought of it myself; but a full twenty minutes passed before they gave us a sign, and then hardly the sign I looked for. One of them, rousing himself lazily, entered the cave and became lost to our view. The other, slinging his rifle about his shoulders, came deliberately towards us, stealthily, furtively, for all the world as though he were fully aware of our presence and about to make it known. This, be it said, was but an idea of my awakened imagination. Whatever had been designed against us by the master of the Villa San Jorge, an open assault upon the mountain side certainly had not been contemplated. The watchman must, in plain truth, have been about to visit the ladder's head to ascertain if all were well with his comrade there. Such a journey he did not complete. The Jap sprang upon him suddenly, at the very moment he threatened almost to tread upon us, and he fell without a single word at my feet as though stricken by some fell disease which forbade him to move a limb or utter a single cry.

Okyada had caught him with one arm about his throat and a clever hand behind his knees. As he lay prone upon the rock, he was gagged and bound with a speed and dexterity I have never seen imitated. Fear, it may be, was my servant's ally. The wretched man's eyes seemed to start almost out of his head when he found himself thus outwitted, an arm of iron choking him, and lithe limbs of incomparable strength roping his body as with bonds of steel. Certainly, he made no visible effort of resistance, rather consenting to his predicament than fighting against it; and no sooner was the last knot of the cord tied than Okyada sprang up and pointed dramatically to the open door no longer watched by sentries. To gain this was the work of a moment. I drew my revolver, and, crossing the open space, looked down deliberately into the pit. The story of the Villa San Jorge lay at my feet. General Fordibras, I said, had no longer a secret to conceal from me.

I will not dwell upon those emotions of exultation, perhaps of vanity, which came to me in that amazing moment. All that I had sacrificed to this dangerous quest, the perils encountered and still awaiting me—what were they when measured in the balance of this instant revelation, the swift and glowing vision with which the night rewarded me? I knew not the price I would have paid for the knowledge thus instantly come to my possession.

Something akin to a trance of reflection fell upon me. I watched the scene almost as a man intoxicated by the very atmosphere of it. A sense of time and place and personality was lost to me. The great book of the unknown had been opened before me, and I read on entranced. This, I say, was the personal note of it. Let me put it aside to speak more intimately of reality and of that to which reality conducted

me.

Now, the cave of the mountain, I judge, had a depth of some third of a mile. It was in aspect not unlike what one might have imagined a mighty subterranean cathedral to have been. Of vast height, the limestone vault above showed me stalactites of such great size and infinite variety that they surpassed all ideas I had conceived of Nature and her wonders.

Depending in a thousand forms, here as foliated corbels, there as vaulting shafts whose walls had fallen and left them standing, now as quatrefoils and cusps, sometimes seeming to suggest monster gargoyles, the beauty, the number, and the magnificence of them could scarcely have been surpassed by any wonders of limestone in all the world. That there were but few corresponding stalagmites rising up from the rocky ground must be set down to the use made of this vast chamber and the work then being undertaken in it. No fewer than nine furnaces I counted at a first glance—glowing furnaces through whose doors the dazzling whiteness of unspeakable fires blinded the eyes and illuminated the scene as though by unearthly lanterns.

And there were men everywhere, half-naked men, leather-aproned and shining as though water had been poured upon their bodies. These fascinated me as no mere natural beauty of the scene or the surprise of it had done. They were the servants of the men to whom I had thrown down the glove so recklessly. They were the servants of those who, armed and unknown, sailed the high seas in their flight from cities and from justice. This much I had known from the first. Their numbers remained to astonish me beyond all measure.

And of what nature was their task at the furnaces? I had assumed at the first thought that they were workers in precious metals, in the gold and silver which the cleverest thieves of Europe shipped here to their hands. Not a little to my astonishment, the facts did not at the moment bear out my supposition. Much of the work seemed shipwright's business or such casting as might be done at any Sheffield blast furnace. Forging there was, and shaping and planing—not a sign of any criminal occupation, or one that would bear witness against them. The circumstance, however, did not deceive me. It fitted perfectly into the plan I had prepared against my coming to Santa Maria, and General Fordibras's discovery of my journey. Of course, these men would not be working precious metals—not at least to-night. This I had said when recollection of my own situation came back to me suddenly; and realising the folly of further espionage, I turned about to find Okyada and quit the spot.

Then I discovered that my servant had left the plateau, and that I stood face to face with the ugliest and most revolting figure of a Jew it has ever been my misfortune to look upon.

## CHAPTER XIV.

VALENTINE IMROTH.

*Dr. Fabos Meets the Jew.*

Imagine a man some five feet six in height, weak and tottering upon crazy knees, and walking laboriously by the aid of a stick. A deep green shade habitually covered protruding and bloodshot eyes, but for the nonce it had been lifted upon a high and cone-shaped forehead, the skin of which bore the scars of ancient wounds and more than one jagged cut. A goat's beard, long and unkempt and shaggy, depended from a chin as sharp as a wedge; the nose was prominent, but not without a suggestion of power; the hands were old and tremulous, but quivering still with the desire of life. So much a glare of the furnace's light showed me at a glance. When it died down, I was left alone in the darkness with this revolting figure, and had but the dread suggestion of its presence for my companion.

"Dr. Fabos of London. Is it not Dr. Fabos? I am an old man, and my eyes do not help me as once they did. But I think it is Dr. Fabos!"

I turned upon him and declared myself, since any other course would have made me out afraid of him.

"I am Dr. Fabos—yes, that is so. And you, I think, are the Polish Jew they call Val Imroth?"

He laughed, a horrible dry throaty laugh, and drew a little nearer to me.

"I expected you before—three days ago," he said, just in the tone of a cat purring. "You made a very slow passage, Doctor—a very slow passage, indeed. All is well that ends well, however. Here you are at Santa Maria, and there is your yacht down yonder. Let me welcome you to the Villa."

So he stood, fawning before me, his voice almost a whisper in my ear. What to make of it I knew not at all. Harry Avenhill, the young thief I captured at Newmarket, had spoken of this dread figure, but always in connection with Paris, or Vienna, or Rome. Yet here he was at Santa Maria, his very presence tainting the air as with a chill breath of menace and of death. My own rashness in coming to the island never appeared so utterly to be condemned, so entirely without excuse. This fearful old man might be deaf to every argument I had to offer. There was no crime in all the story he had not committed or would not commit. With General Fordibras I could have dealt—but with him!

"Yes," I said quite calmly, "that is my yacht. She will start for Gibraltar tomorrow if I do not return to her. It will depend upon my friend, General Fordibras."

I said it with what composure I could command—for this was all my defence. His reply was a low laugh and a bony finger which touched my hand as with a die of

ice.

“It is a dangerous passage to Gibraltar, Dr. Fabos. Do not dwell too much upon it. There are ships which never see the shore again. Yours might be one of them.”

“*Unberufen*. The German language is your own. If my boat does not return to Gibraltar, and thence to London, in that case, Herr Imroth, you may have many ships at Santa Maria, and they will fly the white ensign. Be good enough to credit me with some small share of prudence. I could scarcely stand here as I do had I not measured the danger—and provided against it. You were not then in my calculations. Believe me, they are not to be destroyed even by your presence.”

Now, he listened to this with much interest and evident patience; and I perceived instantly that it had not failed to make an impression upon him. To be frank, I feared nothing from design, but only from accident, and although I had him covered by my revolver, I never once came near to touching the trigger of it. So mutually in accord, indeed, were our thoughts that, when next he spoke, he might have been giving tongue to my apprehensions:

“A clever man—who relies upon the accident of papers. My dear friend, would all the books in our great library in Rome save you from yonder men if I raised my voice to call them? Come, Dr. Fabos, you are either a fool or a hero. You hunt me, Valentine Imroth, whom the police of twenty cities have hunted in vain. You visit us as a schoolboy might have done, and yet you are as well acquainted with your responsibilities as I am. What shall I say of you? What do you say of yourself when you ask the question, ‘Will these men let me go free? Will they permit my yacht to make Europe again?’ Allow me to answer that, and in my turn I will tell you why you stand here safe beside me when at a word of mine, at a nod, one of these white doors would open and you would be but a little whiff of ashes before a man could number ten. No, my friend; I do not understand you. Some day I shall do so—and then God help you!”

It was wonderful to hear how little there was either of vain boasting or of melodramatic threat in this strange confession. The revolting hawk-eyed Jew put his cards upon the table just as frankly as any simpering miss might have done. I perplexed him, therefore he let me live. My own schemes were so many childish imaginings to be derided. The yacht, Europe, the sealed papers which would tell my story when they were opened—he thought that he might mock them as a man mocks an enemy who has lost his arms by the way. In this, however, I perceived that I must now undeceive him. The time had come to play my own cards—the secret cards which not even his wit had brought into our reckoning.

“Herr Imroth,” I said quietly, “whether you understand me or no is the smallest concern to me. Why I came to Santa Maria, you will know in due season. Meanwhile, I have a little information for your ear and for your ear alone. There is in Paris, Rue Gloire de Marie, number twenty, a young woman of the name of——”

I paused, for the light, shining anew, showed me upon the old man’s face something I would have paid half my fortune to see there. Fear, and not fear alone: dread, and yet something more than dread:—human love, inhuman passion, the evil

spirit of all malice, all desire, all hate. How these emotions fired those limpid eyes, drew down the mouth in passion, set the feeble limbs trembling. And the cry that escaped his lips—the shriek of terror almost, how it resounded in the silence of the night!—the cry of a wolf mourning a cub, of a jackal robbed of a prey. Never have my ears heard such sounds or my soul revolted before such temper.

“Devil,” he cried. “Devil of hell, what have you to do with her?”

I clutched his arm and drew him down toward me:

“Life for a life. Shall she know the truth of this old man’s story, the old man who goes to her as a husband clad in benevolence and well-doing? Shall she know the truth, or shall my friends in Paris keep silence? Answer, old man, or, by God, they shall tell it to her to-morrow.”

He did not utter a single word. Passion or fear had mastered him utterly and robbed him both of speech and action. And herein the danger lay; for no sooner had I spoken than the light of a lantern shone full upon my face, while deep down as it were in the very bowels of the earth, an alarm bell was ringing.

The unknown were coming up out of the pit. And the man who could have saved me from them had been struck dumb as though by a judgment of God!

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE ALARM.

*Dr. Fabos is Made a Prisoner.*

The Jew seemed unable to utter a sound, but the men who came up out of the cave made the night resound with their horrid cries.

What happened to me in that instant of fierce turmoil, of loud alarm, and a coward's frenzy, I have no clear recollection whatever. It may have been that one of the men struck me, and that I fell—more possibly they dragged me down headlong into the pit, and the press of them alone saved me from serious hurt. The truth of it is immaterial. There I was presently, with a hundred of them about me—men of all nations, their limbs dripping with sweat, their eyes ablaze with desire of my life, their purpose to kill me as unmistakable as the means whereby they would have contrived it.

It has been my endeavour in this narrative to avoid as far as may be those confessions of purely personal emotions which are incidental to all human endeavour. My own hopes and fears and disappointments are of small concern to the world, nor would I trespass upon the patience of others with their recital. If I break through this resolution at this moment, it is because I would avoid the accusation of a vaunted superiority above my fellows in those attributes of courage which mankind never fails to admire. The men dragged me down into the pit, I say and were greedy in their desire to kill me. The nature of the death they would have inflicted upon me had already been made clear by the words the Jew had spoken. The pain of fire in any shape has always been my supreme dread, and when the dazzling white light shone upon me from the unspeakable furnaces, and I told myself that these men would shrink from no measure which would blot out every trace of their crime in an instant, then, God knows, I suffered as I believe few have done. Vain to say that such a death must be too horrible to contemplate. The faces of the men about me belied hope. I read no message of pity upon any one of them—nothing but the desire of my life, the criminal blood-lust and the anger of discovery. And, God be my witness, had they left me my revolver, I would have shot myself where I stood.

An unnameable fear! A dread surpassing all power of expression! Such terror as might abase a man to the very dust, send him weeping like a child, or craving mercy from his bitterest enemy. This I suffered in that moment when my imagination reeled at its own thoughts, when it depicted for me the agony that a man must suffer, cast pitilessly into the bowels of a flaming furnace, and burned to ashes as coal is burned when the blast is turned upon it. Nothing under heaven or earth would I not



have given the men if thereby the dread of the fire had been taken from me. I believe that I would have bartered my very soul for the salvation of the pistol or the knife.

Let this be told, and then that which follows after is the more readily understood. The men dragged me down into the pit and stood crying about me like so many ravening wolves. The Jew, forcing his way through the press, uttered strange sounds, incoherent and terrible, and seeming to say that he had already judged and condemned me. In such a sense the men interpreted him, and two of them moving the great levers which opened the furnace doors, they revealed the very heart of the monstrous fire, white as the glory of the sun, glowing as a lake of flame, a torrid, molten, unnameable fire toward which strong arms impelled me, blows thrust me, the naked bodies of the human devils impelled me. For my part, I turned upon them as a man upon the brink of the most terrible death conceivable. They had snatched my revolver from me. I had but my strong arms, my lithe shoulders, to pit against theirs; and with these I fought as a wild beast at bay. Now upon my feet, now down amongst them, striking savage blows at their upturned faces, it is no boast to say that their very numbers thwarted their purpose and delayed the issue. And, more than this, I found another ally, one neither in their calculations nor my own. This befriended me beyond all hope, served me as no human friendship could have done. For, in a word, it soon appeared that they could thrust me but a little way toward the furnace doors, and beyond that point were impotent. The heat overpowered them. Trained as they were, they could not suffer it. I saw them falling back from me one by one. I heard them vainly crying for this measure or for that. The furnace mastered them. It left me at last alone before its open doors, and, staggering to my feet, I fell headlong in a faint that death might well have terminated.

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A cool air blowing upon my forehead gave me back my senses—I know not after what interval of time or space. Opening my eyes, I perceived that men were carrying me in a kind of palanquin through a deep passage of the rock, and that torches of pitch and flax guided them as they went. The tunnel was lofty, and its roof clean cut as though by man and not by Nature. The men themselves were clothed in long white blouses, and none of them appeared to carry arms. I addressed the nearest of them, and asked him where I was. He answered me in French, not unkindly, and with an evident desire to be the bearer of good tidings.

“We are taking you to the Valley House, monsieur—it is Herr Imroth’s order.”

“Are these the men who were with him down yonder?”

“Some of them, monsieur. Herr Imroth has spoken, and they know you. Fear nothing—they will be your friends.”

My sardonic smile could not be hidden from him. I understood that the Jew had found his tongue in time to save my life, and that this journey was a witness to the fact. At the same time, an intense weakness quite mastered my faculties, and left me in that somewhat dreamy state when every circumstance is accepted without

question, and all that is done seems in perfect accord with the occasion. Indeed, I must have fallen again into a sleep of weakness almost immediately, for, when next I opened my eyes, the sun was shining into the room where I lay, and no other than General Fordibras stood by my bedside, watching me. Then I understood that this was what the Frenchman meant by the Valley House, and that here the Jew's servants had carried me from the cave of the forges.

Now, I might very naturally have looked to see Joan's father at an early moment after my arrival at Santa Maria; and yet I confess that his presence in this room both surprised and pleased me. Whatever the man might be, however questionable his story, he stood in sharp contrast to the Jew and the savages with whom the Jew worked, up yonder in the caves of the hills. A soldier in manner, polished and reserved in speech, the General had been an enigma to me from the beginning. Nevertheless, excepting only my servant Okyada, I would as soon have found him at my bedside as any man upon the island of Santa Maria; and when he spoke, though I believed his tale to be but a silly lie, I would as lief have heard it as any common cant of welcome.

"I come to ask after a very foolish man," he said, with a sternness which seemed real enough. "It appears that the visit was unnecessary."

I sat up in bed and filled my lungs with the sweet fresh air of morning.

"If you know the story," I said, "we shall go no further by recalling the particulars of it. I came here to find what you and your servants were doing at Santa Maria, and the discovery was attended by unpleasant consequences. I grant you the foolishness—do me the favour to spare me the pity."

He turned away from my bedside abruptly and walked to the windows as though to open them still wider.

"As you will," he said; "the time may come when neither will spare the other anything. If you think it is not yet——"

"It shall be when you please. I am always ready, General Fordibras. Speak or be silent; you can add very little to that which I know. But should you choose to make a bargain with me——?"

He wheeled about, hot with anger.

"What dishonour is this?" he exclaimed. "You come here to spy upon me; you escape from my house like a common footpad, and go up to the mines——"

"The mines, General Fordibras?"

"Nowhere else, Dr. Fabos. Do you think that I am deceived? You came to this country to steal the secrets of which I am the rightful guardian. You think to enrich yourself. You would return to London, to your fellow knaves of Throgmorton Street, and say, 'There is gold in the Azores: exploit them, buy the people out, deal with the Government of Portugal.' You pry upon my workmen openly, and but for my steward, Herr Imroth, you would not be alive this morning to tell the story. Are you the man with whom I, Hubert Fordibras, the master of these lands, shall make a bargain? In God's name, what next am I to hear?"

I leaned back upon the pillow and regarded him fixedly with that look of pity

and contempt the discovery of a lie rarely fails to earn.

“The next thing you are to hear,” I said quietly, “is that the English Government has discovered the true owners of the Diamond Ship, and is perfectly acquainted with her whereabouts.”

It is always a little pathetic to witness the abjection of a man of fine bearing and habitual dignity. I confess to some sympathy with General Fordibras in that moment. Had I struck him he would have been a man before me; but the declaration robbed him instantly even of the distinction of his presence. And for long minutes together he halted there, trying to speak, but lacking words, the lamentable figure of a broken man.

“By what right do you intervene?” he asked at last. “Who sent you to be my accuser? Are you, then, above others, a judge of men? Good God! Do you not see that your very life depends upon my clemency? At a word from me——”

“It will never be spoken,” I said, still keeping my eyes upon him. “Such crimes as you have committed, Hubert Fordibras, have been in some part the crimes of compulsion, in some of accident. You are not wholly a guilty man. The Jew is your master. When the Jew is upon the scaffold, I may be your advocate. That is as you permit. You see that I understand you, and am able to read your thoughts. You are one of those men who shield themselves behind the curtain of crime and let your dupes hand you their offerings covertly. You do not see their faces; you rarely hear their voices. That is my judgment of you—guess-work if you will, my judgment none the less. Such a man tells everything when the alternative is trial and sentence. You will not differ from the others when the proper time comes. I am sure of it as of my own existence. You will save yourself for your daughter’s sake——”

He interrupted me with just a spark of reanimation, perplexing for the moment, but to be remembered afterwards by me to the end of my life.

“Is my daughter more than my honour, then? Leave her out of this if you please. You have put a plain question to me, and I will answer you in the same terms. Your visit here is a delusion; your story a lie. If I do not punish you, it is for my daughter’s sake. Thank her, Dr. Fabos. Time will modify your opinion of me and bring you to reason. Let there be a truce of time, then, between us. I will treat you as my guest, and you shall call me host. What comes after that may be for our mutual good. It is too early to speak of that yet.”

I did not reply, as I might well have done, that our “mutual good” must imply my willingness to remain tongue-tied at a price—to sell my conscience to him and his for just such a sum as their security dictated. It was too early, as he said, to come to that close encounter which must either blast this great conspiracy altogether or result in my own final ignominy. The “truce of time” he offered suited me perfectly. I knew now that these men feared to kill me; my own steadfast belief upon which I had staked my very life, that their curiosity would postpone their vengeance, had been twice justified. They spared me, as I had foreseen that they would, because they wished to ascertain who and what I was, the friends I had behind me, the extent of my knowledge concerning them. Such clemency would continue as long as their

own uncertainty endured. I determined, therefore, to take the General at his word, and, giving no pledge, to profit to the uttermost by every opportunity his fears permitted to me.

“There shall be a truce by all means,” I said; “beyond that I will say nothing. Pledge your honour for my safety here, and I will pledge mine that if I can save you from yourself, I will do so. Nothing more is possible to me. You will not ask me to go further than that?”

He replied, vaguely as before, that time would bring us to a mutual understanding, and that, meanwhile, I was as safe at Santa Maria as in my own house in Suffolk.

“We shall keep you up here at the Châlet,” he said. “It is warmer and drier than the other house. My daughter is coming up to breakfast. You will find her below if you care to get up. I, myself, must go to St. Michael’s again to-day—I have urgent business there. But Joan will show you all that is to be seen, and we shall meet again to-morrow night at dinner if the sea keeps as it is.”

To this I answered that I certainly would get up, and I begged him to send my servant, Okyada, to me. Anxiety for the faithful fellow had been in my mind since I awoke an hour ago; and although my confidence in his cleverness forbade any serious doubt of his safety, I heard the General’s news of him with every satisfaction.

“We believe that your man returned to the yacht last night,” he said. “No doubt, if you go on board to-day, you will find him. The Irish gentleman, Mr. McShanus, was in Villa do Porto inquiring for you very early this morning. My servants can take a message down if you wish it.”

I thanked him, but expressed my intention of returning to the yacht—at the latest to dinner. He did not appear in any way surprised, nor did he flinch at my close scrutiny. Apparently, he was candour itself; and I could not help but reflect that he must have had the poorest opinion both of my own prescience and of my credulity. For my own part, I had no doubts at all about the matter, and I knew that I was a prisoner in the house; and that they would keep me there, either until I joined them or they could conveniently and safely make away with me.

Nor was this to speak of a more dangerous, a subtler weapon, which should freely barter a woman’s honour for my consent, and offer me Joan Fordibras if I would save a rogue’s neck from the gallows.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### AT VALLEY HOUSE.

#### *Joan Fordibras Makes a Confession.*

A French valet came to me when General Fordibras had gone, and offered both to send to the yacht for any luggage I might need, and also, if I wished it, to have the English doctor, Wilson, up from Villa do Porto, to see me. This also had been the General's idea; but I had no hurt of last night's affray beyond a few bruises and an abrasion of the skin where I fell; and I declined the service as politely as might be. As for my luggage, I had taken a dressing-case to the Villa San Jorge, and this had now been brought up to the châlet, as the fellow told me. I said that it would suffice for the brief stay I intended to make at Santa Maria; and dressing impatiently, I went down to make a better acquaintance both with the house and its inmates.

Imagine a pretty Swiss châlet set high in the cleft of a mountain, with a well-wooded green valley of its own lying at its very door, and beyond the valley, on the far side, the sheer cliff of a lesser peak, rising up so forbiddingly that it might have been the great wall of a fortress or a castle. Such was Valley House, a dot upon the mountain side—a jalousied, red-roofed cottage, guarded everywhere by walls of rock, and yet possessing its own little park, which boasted almost a tropic luxuriance. Never have I seen a greater variety of shrubs, or such an odd assortment, in any garden either of Europe or Africa. Box, Scotch fir, a fine show both of orange and lemon in bloom, the citron, the pomegranate, African palms, Australian eucalyptus, that abundant fern, the native cabellino—here you had them all in an atmosphere which suggested the warm valleys of the Pyrenees, beneath a sky which the Riviera might have shown to you. So much I perceived directly I went out upon the verandah of the house. The men who had built this châlet had built a retreat among the hills, which the richest might envy. I did not wonder that General Fordibras could speak of it with pride.

There was no one but an old negro servant about the house when I passed out to the verandah; and beyond wishing me "Good-morning, Massa Doctor," I found him entirely uncommunicative. A clock in the hall made out the time to be a quarter past eleven. I perceived that the table had been laid for the mid-day breakfast, and that two covers were set. The second would be for Joan Fordibras, I said; and my heart beating a little wildly at the thought, I determined, if it was possible, to reconnoitre the situation before her arrival, and to know the best or the worst of it at once. That I was a prisoner of the valley I never had a doubt. It lay upon me, then, to face the fact and so to reckon with it that my wit should find the door which these men had so cunningly closed upon me.

Now, the first observation that I made, standing upon the verandah of the house, was one concerning the sea and my situation regarding it. I observed immediately that the harbour of Villa do Porto lay hidden from my view by the Eastern cliff of the valley. The Atlantic showed me but two patches of blue-green water, one almost to the south-west, and a second, of greater extent, to the north. Except for these glimpses of the ocean, I had no view of the world without the valley—not so much as that of a roof or spire or even of the smoke of a human habitation. Whoever had chosen this site for his *châlet* of the hills had chosen it where man could not pry upon him nor even ships at sea become acquainted with his movements. The fact was so very evident that I accepted it at once, and turned immediately to an examination of the grounds themselves. In extent, perhaps, a matter of five acres, my early opinion of their security was in no way altered by a closer inspection of them. They were, I saw, girt about everywhere by the sheer walls of monstrous cliffs; and as though to add to the suggestion of terror, I discovered that they were defended in their weakness by a rushing torrent of boiling water, foaming upwards from some deep, natural pool below, and thence rushing in a very cataract close to the wall of the mountain at the one spot where a clever mountaineer might have climbed the *arrête* of the precipice and so broken the prison. This coincidence hardly presented its true meaning to me at the first glance. I came to understand it later, as you shall see.

Walls of rock everywhere; no visible gate; no path or road, no crevice or gully by which a man might enter this almost fabulous valley from without! To this conclusion I came at the end of my first tour of the grounds. No prison had ever been contrived so cunningly; no human retreat made more inaccessible. As they had carried me through a tunnel of the mountain last night, so I knew that the owner of the *châlet* came and had returned, and that, until I found the gate of that cavern and my wits unlocked it, I was as surely hidden from the knowledge of men as though the doors of the Schlussenburg had closed upon me.

Such a truth could not but appal me. I accepted it with something very like a shudder and, seeking to forget it, I returned to the hither garden and its many evidences of scientific horticulture. Here, truly, the hand of civilisation and of the human amenities had left its imprint. If this might be, as imagination suggested, a valley of crime unknown, of cruelty and suffering and lust, none the less had those who peopled it looked up sometimes to the sun or bent their heads in homage to the rose. Even at this inclement season, I found blooms abundantly which England would not have given me until May. One pretty bower I shall never forget—an arbour perched upon a grassy bank with a mountain pool and fountain before its doors, and trailing creeper about it, and the great red flower of begonia giving it a sheen of crimson, very beautiful and welcome amidst this maze of green. Here I would have entered to make a note upon paper of all that the morning had taught me; but I was hardly at the door of the little house when I discovered that another occupied it already, and starting back as she looked up, I found myself face to face with Joan Fordibras.

She sat before a rude table of entwined logs, her face resting upon weary arms, and her dark chestnut hair streaming all about her. I saw that she had been weeping, and that tears still glistened upon the dark lashes of her eloquent eyes. Her dress was a simple morning gown of muslin, and a bunch of roses had been crushed by her nervous fingers and the leaves scattered, one by one, upon the ground. At my coming, the colour rushed back to her cheeks, and she half rose as though afraid of me. I stood my ground, however, for her sake and my own. Now must I speak with her, now once and for ever tell her that which I had come to Santa Maria to say.

“Miss Fordibras,” I said quietly; “you are in trouble and I can help you.”

She did not answer me. A flood of tears seemed to conquer her.

“Yes,” she said—and how changed she was from my little Joan of Dieppe! —“Yes, Dr. Fabos, I am in trouble.”

I crossed the harbour and seated myself near her.

“The grief of being misnamed the daughter of a man who is unworthy of being called your father. Tell me if I am mistaken. You are not the daughter of Hubert Fordibras? You are no real relative of his?”

A woman’s curiosity is often as potent an antidote to grief as artifice may devise. I shall never forget the look upon Joan Fordibras’s face when I confessed an opinion I had formed but the half of an hour ago. She was not the General’s daughter. The manner in which he had spoken of her was not the manner of a father uttering the name of his child.

“Did my father tell you that?” she asked me, looking up amazed.

“He has told me nothing save that I should enjoy your company and that of your companion at the breakfast table. Miss Aston, I suppose, is detained?”

This shrewd and very innocent untruth appeared to give her confidence. I think that she believed it. The suggestion that we were not to be alone together did much to make the situation possible. She sat upright now, and began again to pluck the rose leaves from her posy.

“Miss Aston is at the Villa San Jorge. I did not wish to come alone, but my father insisted. That’s why you found me crying. I hated it. I hate this place, and everyone about it. You know that I do, Dr. Fabos. They cannot hide anything from you. I said so when first I saw you in London. You are one of those men to whom women tell everything. I could not keep a secret from you if my life depended upon it.”

“Is there any necessity to do so, Miss Fordibras? Are not some secrets best told to our friends?”

I saw that she was greatly tempted, and it occurred to me that what I had to contend against was some pledge or promise she had given to General Fordibras. This man’s evil influence could neither be concealed nor denied. She had passed her word to him, and would not break it.

“I will tell you nothing—I dare not,” she exclaimed at length, wrestling visibly with a wild desire to speak. “It would not help you; it could not serve you. Leave the place at once, Dr. Fabos. Never think or speak of us again. Go right now at once.

Say good-bye to me, and try to forget that such a person exists. That's my secret; that's what I came up here to tell you, never mind what you might think of me."

A crimson blush came again to her pretty cheeks, and she feared to look me in the eyes. I had quite made up my mind how to deal with her, and acted accordingly. Her promise I respected. Neither fear of the General nor good-will toward me must induce her to break it.

"That's a fine word of wisdom," I said; "but it appears to me that I want a pair of wings if I am to obey you. Did they not tell you that I am a prisoner here?"

"A prisoner—oh no, no——"

"Indeed, so—a prisoner who has yet to find the road which leads to the seashore. Sooner or later I shall discover it, and we will set out upon it together. At the moment, my eyes show me nothing but the hills. Perhaps I am grown a little blind, dear child. If that is so, you must lead me."

She started up amazed, and ran to the door of the arbour. The quick pulsations of her heart were to be counted beneath her frail gown of muslin. I could see that she looked away to the corner of the gardens where the boiling spring swirled and eddied beneath the shallow cliff.

"The bridge is there—down there by the water," she cried excitedly. "I crossed it an hour ago—an iron bridge, Dr. Fabos, with a little flight of steps leading up to it. Why do you talk so wildly? Am I so foolish, then?"

I went and stood beside her, a rose from her bundle in my hand.

"The elves play with us," I said evasively; "your bridge has vanished with the morning mists. The fairies must have carried it over the mountains for the love of a footprint. Let us put it out of our thoughts. Who knows, if we have the mind, that we cannot build another?"

This I said that she might read into it a deeper meaning of my confidence, but the words were vain. White and frightened and terribly afraid, she looked at me for an instant as though I were in some way a consenting party to this evil conspiracy; then as quickly repented of her look, and declared her woman's heart.

"I cannot believe it," she cried; "I am so helpless. Tell me, Dr. Fabos, what shall I do—in God's name, what shall I do?"

"Accept my friendship and bestow upon me your confidence. Promise that you will leave this place when I leave it, and end for ever your association with these men? I ask nothing more. My own secret must go with me yet a little while. But I shall call you Joan, and no name shall be dearer to me—if you wish it, little comrade?"

She turned from me, the hot tears in her eyes. I knew that she would never be afraid of me again, and when a little while had passed I led her to the house, and, as any brother and sister, we sat at the breakfast table and spoke of common things.

And yet, God knows, the shame of such an hour lay heavily upon me. For had not these people been willing to buy their own safety at the price of this young girl's honour?



## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE NINE DAYS OF SILENCE.

#### *Dr. Fabos Comes to Certain Conclusions.*

We were nine days together at the Valley House without any word or sign from those without. The evil of this conspiracy I found almost less to be condemned than the childish folly of it. There is nothing more remarkable in the story of crime than the senile mistakes of some of its masters—men, shrewd to the point of wonder in all other affairs, but betraying their mental aberration in some one act at which even the very ignorant might smile. So it was with this sham story of the valley and the pretended accident which kept me from the ship. Every day, with a punctuality as amusing as the tale was plausible, the old negro and the servants below apologised for the accident which alone, they declared, prevented my return to the ship.

A disaster had overtaken the valley bridge; the passage by the mountains was never used but by General Fordibras alone! That was their tale. As for the General, his desolation would be beyond words when he heard of it. Unfortunately he had been detained at St. Michael's, and they could only imagine that the rough seas of the last few days were answerable for it. All that was humanly possible, they felt sure, was being done by the engineers below. Fortunate that the mining operations in the mountains had brought so many workmen to the island. My release, they said, and that of their young mistress could be but a matter of a few hours.

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Now, I have turned up my diary for those nine days, and I find that upon the first of them I came to certain definite conclusions which may be of interest to my readers. They were these:

(1) The criminals feared nothing from the presence of my yacht. Either the island was watched by some powerful and speedy armed ship of their own, or they had convinced Captain Larry that all was well with me.

(2) They were in league with the local Portuguese officials of Villa do Porto, who, I did not doubt, had been richly rewarded for a little diligent blindness.

(3) They believed that I had fallen in love with Joan Fordibras, and for her sake would either hold my peace for ever or join them. This was their master stroke. It was also the apotheosis of their folly.

Imagine, at the same time, my own difficulties. Save for two ancient servants, a maid and a negro, this young girl and I were alone at the ch<sup>^</sup>atlet and seemingly as remote from the world as though we had been prisoners of an Eastern despotism. She knew and I knew with what hopes and designs this clumsy trap had been

contrived. Let us find solace in each other's society, and our human passion must prove stronger than any merely moral impulse directed against Valentine Imroth and his confederates. Such was the argument employed by our enemies. They would expose me to the condemnation of the world if I withstood them, or secure my silence if I assented to their plans. The thing was so daring, so utterly unexpected, that I do believe it would have succeeded but for one plain fact these men had overlooked. And that was nothing less than the good commonsense and real womanly courage which my little companion brought to our assistance, and offered me unflinchingly in that amazing hour.

For you must understand that we had talked but in enigmas hitherto, both at Dieppe and at the Villa San Jorge, where I went upon landing from my yacht. Now, it fell upon me to speak to her as to one who must share my secrets and be the confidante of them. Cost me what it might, let there be a great love for her growing in my heart, I resolved that not one word of it should be uttered at Santa Maria. So much I owed both to myself and her. There were subjects enough, God knows, upon which a man might be eloquent. I chose the story of her own life to begin with, and heard her story as no other lips could have told it so sweetly.

This was upon the second day of our captivity, a warm, sunny day with a fresh breeze blowing in from west by north and a glorious heaven of blue sky above us. I remember that she wore a gown of lace and had a turquoise chain about her throat. We had breakfasted together and heard the servants' familiar apologies. The General would certainly return from St. Michael's to-day, they said; the engineers could not fail to restore the bridge by sunset. Joan heard them with ears that tingled. I did not hear them at all, but going out with her to the gardens, I asked her if she had always known General Fordibras, and what her recollections of that association were. To which she replied that she remembered him as long as she remembered anyone at all.

"There was another face—so long ago, so very long ago," she said, almost wearily. "I have always hoped and believed that it was my mother's face. When I was a very little girl, I lived in a house which stood by a great river. It must have been Hudson River, I think; General Fordibras used to visit the house. I was very young then, and I wonder that I remember it."

"You left this house," I put it to her, "and then you went to school. Was that in America or London?"

"It was first in New York, then in London, and to finish in Paris. I left school three years ago, and we have been all over the world since. General Fordibras never stops long in one place. He says he is too restless. I don't know, Dr. Fabos. I have given up trying to think about it."

"And hate me accordingly for my questions. I will make them as brief as possible. How long is it since you knew Mr. Imroth, and where did you first meet him?"

This reference plainly embarrassed her. I saw that she answered my question with reluctance.

“Please do not speak of Mr. Imroth. I am afraid of him, Dr. Fabos; I do believe that I am more afraid of him than of anybody I have ever known. If evil comes to me, Mr. Imroth will send it.”

“A natural antipathy. Some day, Joan, you will look upon all this and thank God that a stranger came to your island. I shall have done with Mr. Valentine Imroth then. There will be no need at all to fear him.”

She did not understand me, and plied me with many questions, some exceedingly shrewd, all directed to one end, that she might know the best or the worst of the life that they had been living and what part the General had played in it. To this I responded that I could by no means judge until the case both for and against him were wholly known to me.

“He may be but a dupe,” I said; “time and opportunity will tell me. You owe much to him, you say, for many kindnesses received during childhood. I shall not forget that when the day of reckoning comes. Joan, I shall forget no one who has been kind to you.”

Her gratitude was pretty enough to see, and I witnessed it many times during the long hours of those hazardous days. From morn to night she was my little companion of the gardens. I came to know her as a man rarely knows a woman who is not a wife to him. Every bush, every path, every tree and shrub of our kingdom we named and numbered. Grown confident in my protection, her sweet laughter became the music of the valley, her voice the notes of its song, her presence its divinity. If I had discerned the secret of her fearlessness, that must be a secret to me also, locked away as a treasure that a distant day will reveal. My own anxieties were too heavy that I dared to share them with her. The yacht, my friends, my servant, where were they? What happened beyond that monstrous curtain of the mountains, that precipice which hid the island world from us? Had they done nothing, then, those comrades in whose loyalty I trusted? Was it possible that even the faithful Okyada had deserted me? I did not believe it for an instant. My eyes told me that it was not true. A voice spoke to me every day. I read it as a man reads a book of fate—an image cast upon the waters, a sign given which shall not be mistaken.

He who pits his life against the intelligence of criminals, must be equipped with many natural weapons. Nothing, certainly, is more necessary than the habit of observation. To watch every straw the winds of conspiracy may blow, to read every cryptic message the hand of crime may write, to be ever alert, vigilant, resourceful, is something more than mere equipment. It is very salvation to the investigator. Trained in all these qualities by long years of patient study, there were signs and omens of the valley for me which another might have passed by without remark. Strange footprints upon the darkest paths, shrubs disturbed, scraps of paper thrown down with little caution—not one of them escaped me. But beyond them all, the rampart of the foaming water enchained my attention and fascinated me as at some human call to action. *Day by day the volume of the water in the boiling river was growing less.* I first remarked it on the third day of our imprisonment; I made sure of it on the fifth day. Inch by inch, from ledge to ledge, it sank in its channel.

Another, perhaps, would have attributed this to some natural phenomenon. I had too much faith in the man who served me to believe any such thing. Okyada was at work, I said. The hour of my liberty was at hand.

You may imagine how this discovery affected me, and how much it was in my mind when I spoke to Joan of our approaching days of freedom. To my question, whether she would visit me again at my house in Suffolk, she replied chiefly by a flushing of her clear cheeks and a quick look from those eyes which could be so eloquent.

“Your sister did not like me,” she rejoined evasively; “the dear old thing, I could see her watching me just as though I had come to steal you from her.”

“Would you have felt very guilty if you had done so, Joan?”

“Yes,” she said, and this so seriously that I regretted the question; “guilty to my life’s end, Dr. Fabos.”

I knew that she referred to the story of her own life and the men among whom destiny had sent her. Here was a barrier of the past which must stand between us to all time, she would have said. The same thought had disquieted me often, not for my sake but for her own.

“I would to God, Joan,” said I, “there were no greater guilt in the world than this you speak of. You forbid me to say so. Shall I tell you why?”

She nodded her head, looking away to the patch of blue water revealed by the gorge of the mountains. I lay at her side and had all a man’s impulse to take her in my arms and tell her that which my heart had prompted me to say so many days. God knows, I had come to love this fragile, sweet-willed child of fortune beyond any other hope of my life or ambition of the years. Day by day, her eyes looked into my very soul, awakening there a spirit and a knowledge of whose existence I had been wholly ignorant. I loved her, and thus had fallen into the snare my enemies had set upon me. How little they understood me, I thought.

“You forbid me to say so, Joan,” I ran on, “because you do not trust me.”

“Do not trust you, Dr. Fabos?”

“Not sufficiently to say that I am about to save you from all dangers—even the danger of past years.”

“You cannot do that—oh, you cannot do it, Dr. Fabos.”

I covered her hand with my own, and tried to compel her to look me in the face.

“When a woman learns to love and is loved she has no past,” I said. “All that should concern her is the happiness of the man to whom she has given her life. In your own case, I believe that we shall read the story of bygone years together and find it a sweet story. I do not know, Joan; I am only guessing; but I think it will be a story of a woman’s love and a father’s suffering, and of an innocent man upon whom the gates of prison were long closed. Say that the child of these two, entitled to a fortune in her own right, became the prey of a villain, and we shall be far upon our way. That’s the thought of your prophet. He would give much, Joan, if the facts were as he believes them to be.”

Be sure she turned her head at this and looked me full in the face. I have never

seen so many emotions expressed upon a childish face—joy, doubt, love, fear. Quick as all her race to read an enigma, she understood me almost as soon as I had spoken. A light of wondrous thankfulness shone in her eyes. There were long minutes together when we sat there in silence, and the only sound was that of her heart beating.

“Oh,” she cried, “if it were true, Dr. Fabos, if it were true!”

“I will prove it true before we have been in England a month.”

She laughed a little sadly.

“England—England. How far is England away? And my own dear America?”

“Seven days in my yacht, *White Wings*.”

“If we were birds to fly over the hills!”

“The hills will be kind to us. To-day, to-morrow, whenever it is, Joan, will you cross the hills with me?”

She promised me with a warmth that betrayed her desire. Fearing longer to dwell upon it, I left and went again to the little river to see what message it had for me. Did the waters still ebb away or had my fancy been an hallucination?

Standing this day upon the very brink of the chasm through which the river flowed, I knew I was not mistaken. The stream had subsided by another foot at the least; it no longer raced and tumbled through the gorge; it was scarcely more than warm to the hand. Someone without had diverted its course and would dam it altogether when the good hour came. When that hour might be I had no means of knowing. But my course was clear. I must rest neither night nor day while deliverance was at hand; there must be neither sleeping nor waking for me until Okyada called me and the gate stood open.

And what of Joan, what of my promise to her? Should I leave her the prisoner of the valley or take her over the hills as I had promised? The responsibility was greater than any I had ever faced. Let her go with me, and what a tale these villains would have to tell the world! Let her remain, and what cruelty, what persecution might she not suffer at the Valley House! I knew not what to do. It may be that Fortune wished well to me when she took the matter out of my hands and left me no alternative but to go alone. However it be, I shall relate in a word the simple fact that Okyada, my servant, entered my bedroom at ten o'clock that very night, and that, when I crossed the landing to wake Joan, she did not answer me, nor could my diligent search discover her to be in the house at all.

And the minutes of my opportunity were precious beyond all reckoning.

“Good God!” I cried, “that I must leave her to such men and to such a judgment!”

For I knew that it must be so, and that by flight alone, and the perils of flight, would our salvation be won.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### DOWN TO THE SEA.

#### *Dr. Fabos Leaves the Valley House.*

There was not a sound within the house, nor did an open window upon the landing admit any signal of alarm from the gardens. I could but hazard that the little Jap had crossed the gully of the river and come by such a road into the valley. To question him would have been as absurd as to delay. Here he was, and there stood the open door. When he thrust a revolver into my hand and bade me follow him by the low verandah to the gardens below, I obeyed without further hesitation. The mystery of Joan's disappearance asked for no clever solution. This night, I said, the Jew had meant to kill me. And for the first time, it may be, I realised the deadly peril I had lived through at the Valley House.

Okyada has never been a man of many words. I think he uttered but two that night as we crossed the valley garden and made for the river bank. "Shoot, master," he said, meaning that if any barred the way, the time for passive flight had passed. I nodded my head in answer, and pressed closer upon his heels as he entered the maze of shrubs which defended the gully. The silence about us had become a burden to the nerves. Was it possible that none of the Jew's men watched the garden? Indeed, for a moment, that appeared to be the truth.

We gained the bank of the whirlpool of yesterday, and for a few minutes lay flat in the shadow of the great border of the rock which rises up above the gully. Behind us we could espy the lighted windows of the bedroom I had just left and the clear shape of the silent châlet. The gardens and the woods were so many patches of black against an azure sky of night. The water below us flowed, in colour a deep indigo, between walls of lightless rock, in a bed of polished stone. Not a breath of wind stirred the pines upon the hill side. We could no longer see the ocean without or the friendly lights it showed to us. We might have been fugitives upon a desert island; and this deception would have continued possible until the sound of a distant rifle-shot awoke a thousand echoes in the hills and shattered in a single instant the dream of security we had found so pleasing.

Okyada sprang up at the sound and began to speak with an earnestness of which he was rarely guilty.

"They have found the honourable Captain—quick, master, we must go to him," he said.

My answer was to point up to the sloping lawn of the garden we had left. There, in single file, the figures of seven men, crossing the grass boldly toward the châlet, were clearly to be discerned. I had scarcely observed them when a movement in the

shrubby immediately behind us betrayed the presence of others—three in all—who came out to the water's edge at a place not ten yards from where we stood, and halting there a little while to inspect the gully, afterwards made off through the woods as though to join the others above.

“Old Val gets such notions into his woolly cranium,” said one of them as he went. “If there's any lousy Englishman going across there to-night, I'm derved if he ain't a flip-flop mermaid.”

A second ventured that the water was lower than he had ever seen it, while the third added the opinion that, low or high, it was hot enough to warm the grog of a Congo nigger, and a ——— sight too hot for any police nark to try it.

We listened to them, crouching low on the rock and with our revolvers ready to our hands. Had the most trifling accident occurred, a falling pebble or a clumsy movement betrayed us, that, I am convinced, would have been the whole story of the night. But we lay as men long practised in the arts of silence, and not until the trees hid the men from our sight did Okyada stand up again and prepare to cross the gully.

“Go first, master,” he said. “Here is the rope. Our friends with the honourable Captain wait yonder above. Let us bring them the good news.”

Now, I saw that, as he spoke, he had caught up a rope which had been dexterously fixed to a boulder upon the opposite bank of the stream and allowed to trail in the water while he went to fetch me from the house. Fixing this as cleverly to the rock upon our side, he made a bridge by which any strong lad could have crossed, the pool being as low as it then was; and no sooner had he given me the signal than I swung myself out and almost immediately found a footing upon the further shore. His own passage, when first he crossed, must have been very perilous, I thought; and I could but imagine that he had thrown the rope over first and trusted to the grappling iron affixed to the end upon the garden side. This, however, was but a speculation. He crossed now as I had done, and together we cast the knot from the boulder and drew the rope in. If all our acts were cool and collected, I set the fact down to the knowledge that we were prisoners of the valley no longer, and that the hills were before us. What mattered the alarm now sounding through the gardens, the hoarse cry of voices, the blowing of whistles, the running to and fro of excited men? More ominous by far was a second rifle-shot, awakening crashing echoes in the mountains. This, I believed, one of my own yacht's company had fired. Plainly our men had either stumbled upon an ambush or fallen into some snare set upon the road we must follow. The truth of the issue could not but be momentous to us all. Either we must find them prisoners or free men who stood in instant danger. There could be no moment of delay which was not hazardous, and we permitted none directly our foothold had been secured and the rope drawn in.

“Did you come alone, Okyada?” I asked my servant presently.

He dissented as he folded the coils of rope.

“The honourable Scotchman—he is waiting with the lantern, excellency.”

I smiled, but did not offend his sense of that which was due to so great a person

as Balaam, the Scotch boatswain.

“Would it be far from here, Okyada?”

“That which your excellency could walk in a minute.”

I said no more, but followed him up the cliff side, scrambling and slipping like a boy upon a holiday jaunt, and no less eager for the heights. To the darkness of the night and the quickness of our movements, my faithful servant and I undoubtedly owed our lives. Remember that the valley now raised the cry of alarm from one end to the other. Whistles were blown, bells were rung, rifles fired wildly. That the bullets struck the rocks both above and below us, my ears told me unmistakably. Had we been an open mark moving in the clear light of day, the suspense of this flight, the doubt and the hazard of it had been easier to support. As it was, we went on blindly, our hands clasping the rough boulders, our feet scattering the pebbles of the path; and conscious through it all that a wild bullet might find a lucky billet and grass either or both of us as though we had been hares in a tricky covert. Never was a man more thankful than I when a vast fissure in the cliff side appeared before us suddenly as a sanctuary door opened by an unknown friend’s hand. By it we passed gladly, and were instantly lost to the view of those in the valley; while a profound silence of ultimate night enveloped us. There was no longer the need to pant and toil upon a crazy slope. Nature herself had here cut a path, and it appeared to lead into the very heart of the mountain.

Now, this path we followed, it may have been for some two hundred yards in a direction parallel to that of the valley we had quitted. Its gentle declivity brought us in the end to a low cavern of the rock, and here we found the boatswain, Balaam, sitting with his back to the cliff, smoking his pipe and guarding his ship’s lantern as calmly as though the scene had been Rotherhithe and the day a seaman’s Saturday. Hearing our approach, he bestirred himself sufficiently to fend the light and to ask a question.

“Would it be the Doctor and the wild man?” he asked, and without waiting for an answer he ran on, “I kenned your step, Doctor, and said you were doing finely. There’s firing on the hills, sir, and ye would be wise not to bide. I’m no gleg at the running myself, but yon manny can take the licht, and I’ll make shift for myself. Ay, Doctor, but if I had that bit of an ass the boys go daft upon——”

I told him to show the way and not to talk, though I was glad enough to hear the good fellow’s voice. His name was Machie, but a donkey ride at Cowes christened him Balaam for good and all aboard the *White Wings*. Very methodically now, and with a seaman’s widening lurch, he set out to cross the cavern, Okyada and I upon his heels and all the mesh of subterranean wonder about us. Here, for a truth, a man might have feared to go at all, lantern or no lantern in his hand; for the cavern revealed the source of the boiling springs, and there was one great chamber of the rock so dreadful to breathe in, so white with steam and scalding spray, that my own courage would have recoiled from it but for the example set me by these brave fellows. They, however, held straight on without a word spoken, and coming to a clearer air presently they indicated to me that we were approaching some place of



danger, and must now go with circumspection. Then I saw that the cavern roof narrowed rapidly until we stood in a passage so regularly moulded that the hand of man might have excavated it. And beyond this lay the Atlantic, plainly visible though the night was moonless. Never did a glimpse of the open water cheer my heart so bravely. Liberty, home, my friends! A man is a man upon the sea, though every port but one be shut against him. And the breath of life is in his lungs, and the desire of life at his heart. Nay, who shall deny it?

A sharp exclamation from the Scotchman, a sudden halt upon my servant's part, quickly tempered these reflections upon liberty and brought me back to a sense of our situation and its dangers. That which they had seen, I now perceived to be nothing less than the figure of a man standing with his back to the rock as though guarding the entrance to the tunnel and there keeping watch, not only upon the path, but upon another figure which lay prone in the fair way and was, I had no doubt whatever, a figure of the dead. To come instantly to the conclusion that the dead was one of our own, and that he had been killed by one of the rifles whose report we had so recently heard, I found natural enough. Not only was it my thought, but that of the others with me, and together we halted in the cavern and asked what we should do. To be sure, we were not to be affrighted by a single sentry, though he carried a rifle in his hand; but the certainty that others would be within call, and that a single cry might bring them upon us, robbed us for a moment of any clear idea, and held us prisoners of the cave.

"'Twould have been the firing that I heard syne," the boatswain whispered.

I turned to Okyada and asked him what we should do. His own uncertainty was reflected in his attitude. He stood as still as a figure of marble.

"The master wait," he said presently. "I think that I shall know if the master wait. Let the lantern be covered. I shall see by the darkness."

I told him that I forbade him to go, and that it was madness to suppose that the sentry would stand there alone. He did not hear me, disappearing immediately upon his words, and being lost to our view as completely as though the earth had opened and swallowed him up. I shall always say that a quicker, surer-footed, or more faithful fellow never lived to earn the gratitude of an unemotional master. My own confidence in him found its best expression in the complacency with which I waited for his news. He would kill the sentry if need be—of that I felt sure—and there was something horrible in the thought that a living man, whose figure we could see in the dim light beyond the cavern, stood upon the very brink of eternity and might have spoken his last word on earth. This reflection was my own. The stolid boatswain made nothing of it. He covered the lantern methodically and squatted back against the rock.

"Yon yellow laddie's fine," he whispered. "'Twould be as good as dead the man were. Has your honour such a thing as a bit of baccy upon ye? No; well, I'll do well wanting it."

I smiled, but did not answer him. In truth, I had begun to find the minutes of waiting intolerable. What with the oppressive atmosphere of the tunnel, the heated,

steam-laden air, and upon this the ghostly fascination of the spectre at the cavern's mouth, it came to me that my own strength might not carry me safely through the ordeal. What kept Okyada? The sentry, on his part, did not appear to have moved since I had first seen him. There was no sound in the cave save that of the hissing steam behind us. I could not discover the little figure of my servant, though I was looking from the darkness toward the light. Had he come to the conclusion that it was dangerous to go on? This seemed possible, and I had already taken a few steps towards the tunnel's mouth when his figure suddenly emerged into the light, and standing side by side with the sentry, he uttered that soft, purring whistle which called to us to come on.

"Yon's one of our own, then," the boatswain said, starting to his feet clumsily.

"Then someone has gone under, and he is keeping watch over him," I replied. "God send that it is not one of our crew."

"Amen to that, sir, though 'twere in a Christian man to say that we maun all die when the day comes."

"But not in this cursed island or at the hands of a rascally Jew. The day will be an unlucky one if it comes here, my man. Put your best foot foremost, and say that it shall not."

My words were Greek to him, of course; and he answered me with a strange oath and an expression of opinion upon Portuguese and others which was quite valueless. My own curiosity now turned, however, to consider the odd fact that the sentry remained motionless, and that Okyada did not appear to have exchanged a single word with him. Who, then, was the man, and what kept him in that grotesque attitude? At a distance of fifty yards from the light I could not have told you, but at twenty yards I understood. The wretched man was as stone dead as his comrade who lay upon the path. A bullet from an unknown rifle had shot him through the heart as he stood in ambush waiting for me. So much I hazarded on the instant. The truth must be made known to me upon the yacht's deck.

I name the yacht, and this is to tell you in a word that, coming out of the pit, we espied her, lying off the headland—a picture of life and light upon the still water. There below, upon the shore, stood the friends who had known so many anxieties, suffered upon my account such weary days of waiting, such long hours of strenuous labour since I had left them. And now I had but to scramble down the rugged cliff side and clasp their hands, and to tell them that all was well with me. But nine days away from them, I seemed to have lived a year apart, to have changed my very self, to be a new man coming into a living world of action from a grave of dreams.

And what voice more earthly could I have heard than that of the unsurpassable Timothy McShanus crying, "Me bhoy!" in tones that might have been heard upon the mountain top?

No, indeed, and Timothy was the first to greet me, and I do believe there were tears of gladness in his eyes.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### IN THE MEANTIME.

#### *Dr. Fabos Hears the News.*

We rowed to the yacht without an instant's delay and made known the good news to the crew. Their cheers must certainly have been heard by half the population of Villa do Porto. Quite convinced that the Jap would fetch me out of the trap, Captain Larry had ordered a supper to be prepared in the cabin, and hardly were we aboard when the corks were popping and the hot meats served. It was touching to witness the good fellows' delight, expressed in twenty ways as seamen will—this man by loud oaths, another by stupefied silence, a third by incoherent roaring, a fourth by the exclamatory desire that he might not find salvation. A man learns by misfortune by what measure of love his friends estimate him. In my case I learned it upon the deck of the *White Wings*, and have never forgotten the lesson.

Okyada, be sure, was the hero of the hour, and we had him down to the cabin immediately, and there pledged him in our saki that comes to us by way of Rheims. So much there was to tell upon both sides that neither side knew where to begin. Strangely elated myself, and suffering from the reaction of the nerves which sets a man walking upon air, I told them very briefly that I had been trapped to the hills, not by stratagem, but by force, and that if they had come an hour later, it would have been to a sepulchre. On their side, the strident voice of Timothy related twenty circumstances in a breath, and unflinching began in the middle of his story and concluded with the beginning.

"We presented ourselves to the authorities as ye ordered us to do, and bad cess to them, they had no English at all to speak of. That was after me friend, Larry, had hunted the innkeeper round the town for to keep him humble in spirit. I went to the Consul's man and says I, 'Tis an Englishman I am upon the high seas though of another nation ashore, and treat us civilly,' says I, 'or be damned if I don't wipe the floor with ye.' 'Twas a mellow-faced party, and not to be made much of. The gendarmes were no better. There was wan av them that had a likeness to the Apostle John, but divil a word of a sane man's gospel could I get out of the fellow. The tale went that ye had gone to St. Michael's, and 'twas by your own will that ye went. I made my compliments to the man who said it, and told him he was a liar. Ean, me bhoy, your friend Fordibras and his friend the Hebrew Jew have bought this island body and soul. The very cable shakes hands with them. We had to go to St. Michael's to send a bit of a message at all."

I interrupted him sharply.

"Did you send the cables, then, Timothy?"

“Would I be after not sending them? And me friend in his grave! They went the day before yesterday. ’Twill be like new wine to Dr. Ean, says I, dead or alive. So we sailed to St. Michael’s. Your fine fellow of a Jap, he was alone twenty hours in the hills. Man, he has the eyes, the ears, the feet of a serpent, and if he’s not a match for the Jew divil, may I never drink champagne again.”

I assented a little gravely. His news meant very much to me. You must know that, before I landed at Villa do Porto at all, I had entrusted to Timothy and to Captain Larry certain messages which were to be cabled to Europe in the gravest emergency only. These messages would tell Scotland Yard; they would make known to the Government and to the Admiralty, and even more important than these, to the great diamond houses, that which I knew of the Jew, Val Imroth, and of his doings upon the high seas. From this time forth the warships of three nations would be scouring the ocean for such witnesses to my story as only the ocean could betray. If, from one point of view, I welcomed the thought, a shadow already lay upon my satisfaction. For if Imroth were arrested, and with him the man known as General Fordibras, what, then, of Joan and her fortunes? These men, I believed, were capable of any infamy. They might well sacrifice the child to their desire for vengeance upon the man who had discovered them. They might even bring her to the bar of a Court of Justice, charged as an accomplice in these gigantic thefts they had committed so many years. To this end they had put my stolen jewels about her neck, and so baited their devilish trap from the earliest hours. I am convinced now that their ultimate object was murder—when it could be safely done, and when the whole of my story was known to them.

“You sent the cables two days ago, Timothy—and what then?” I asked him, not wishing to make too much of it before them. “Have you had any reply from Murray?”

Captain Larry intervened, pointing out that the cables had been sent from St. Michael’s.

“We had to get the ship back, sir,” he said. “I was determined not to leave this place without you if we waited here a twelvemonth. As for the authorities, it was, as Mr. McShanus says, all blubber and fingers, and the General’s money hot in their pockets. When we got back from St. Michael’s, the little Jap came down to the harbour with his story. You were up in the hills, he said, and there was a spring to be dammed to get you out. He had done what he could, rolling the rocks into the water with his own hands until he could hardly stand upright for fatigue, but we sent a boat’s crew up last night and another to-night, and they played bowls with the stones like the good men they are. I would have gone down with your servant, but he’d the conceit to go alone. It’s natural to such a man—no words, no fuss, just a coil of rope about his waist and a couple of revolvers in his hands. He took the Scotch boatswain because he says Scotchmen give nothing away—‘Honourable Englishmen too much tongue,’ he says. I left it with him, because I believe he spoke the straight truth. When he had gone up we posted a couple of men on the shore here, and Mr. McShanus and I took our stand at the cliff’s head. We hadn’t been

there more than half an hour when the first of the rifle-shots was fired. We saw a number of men on the hill-side, and they had fired a rifle for a signal, as we supposed, to others on the shore below. By-and-by we heard another rifle-shot, but saw no one. A little while after that you came down."

I told them that there were two men stone dead at the entrance to the tunnel, and this astonished them greatly. We could only surmise that the Jew's sentinels had quarrelled amongst themselves, and that the second of the shots had been fired by a wounded man as his comrade emerged from the tunnel. Be it as it might, the hazardous nature of my escape became plainer every moment. It needed but Larry's intimation that a steamer had left the island two hours ago to tell me that my life had been saved almost as by a miracle.

"They have heard from Europe that the game is up, and are running to another haven," I said. "There was no longer anything to be got from me, so out came their pistols. If they touch at any port north of Tangier, the police will lay hands upon them. That is not likely. My own opinion is that they are running for the great ship which we saw drifting out there in mid-Atlantic. If it is correct, the game becomes exciting. We can leave no message which can be safely delivered. Should the Government send a cruiser, the officer of it will hardly set out for a blind-man's bluff. If we had coal enough ourselves——"

Captain Larry interrupted me with scarce an apology.

"That was one of my reasons for going to St. Michael's, doctor. Mr. McShanus will tell you that we were lucky. We filled our bunkers—at a stiff price, but still we filled them. The yacht is ready to put to sea this instant if you so desire it."

His news both amazed and troubled me. I will not deny that I had been much tempted to stand by the island until I had definite news of Joan Fordibras and her safety. And now the clear call came to embark without an instant's delay upon a quest which I owed both to myself and to humanity. Undoubtedly I believed that the Jew had taken refuge upon the Diamond Ship. Behind that belief there stood the black fear that he might have carried the child with him to be a hostage for himself and his fellow rogues, and to stand between my justice and his punishment. This I knew to be possible. And if it were so, God help her amid that crew of cut-throats and rogues, hidden from justice upon the unfrequented waters of the Southern Ocean.

But it might not be so, and pursuit of them might leave her to perils as great, and insult as sure, in one or other of those criminal dens the rogues had built for themselves in the cities of Europe. Surely was it a memorable hour and manifest of destiny when it found the yacht ready to put to sea without delay.

"Captain," said I, "do the men understand that this is a voyage from which none of us may return?"

"They so understand it, Dr. Fabos."

"And do they consent willingly?"

"Turn back, and you are upon the brink of a mutiny."

"Then let us go in God's name," said I; "now, this very hour, let us do that duty

to which we are called.”

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE SKIES BETRAY.

#### *A Message Comes from the Diamond Ship.*

I shall carry you next to a scene in the Southern Atlantic, to a day in the month following my escape from the Azores. The morning is a brilliant morning of torrid heat and splendid sunshine. The sea about us is a sea gleaming as a sheeted mirror of the purest silver; a vast, still, silent sea, with a cloudless horizon and a breath as of Southern springtime. The yacht *White Wings* is changed but little since last you saw her at Villa do Porto.

A close observer would mark the mast which carries her apparatus for Marconigrams; she steams very slowly, with a gentle purr of her engines that seems to soothe to sleep. There is a trim sailor on the look-out in her bows, and the second officer paces the bridge with the air of one who has long since ceased to enjoy an active occupation. Down amidships shouts of laughter claim my attention and turn my steps to the spot. The laughter is the laughter of honest seamen. The victim is my friend, McShanus.

He picked himself from the deck, brushed his clothes methodically, and told me that the game had been Ju-Jitsu.

“’Tis the little yellow devil again, and me on my back like a turtle. Says he, ‘The honourable Irishman no puttee Okyada on the floor.’ Says I, ‘Ye wisp of hay, I could knock ye down with my thumb.’ ‘The honourable Irishman try,’ says he. So I just put my hands upon his shoulders and gave him a bit of a push. Sons of Ireland! he dropped to the floor directly I touched him, and where is the relic of Timothy McShanus? Sure, he caught me on the soles of his feet as I fell over him, and shot me twenty yards—me that has the blood of kings in me veins. He grassed me like a rabbit, sir, and there are those who laughed. *Risu inepto res ineptior nulla est.* Let them hear Martial and be hanged to them!”

I comforted Timothy with what words I could, and told him that they were bringing breakfast up to the deck.

“I want a few words with Larry and yourself,” said I, “and hungry men are poor listeners. You have amused the crew, Timothy, and that is something in these days. Be thankful to have played such a noble part and come and eat immediately. There is a capital fish curry—and the loaves are hot from the oven.”

“Faith,” he replied, “if you make me as warm inside as I am out, ’twill be my clothes I am selling to the natives.”

And then he asked almost pitifully.

“’Tis not to say that ye are going back to Europe, Ean, me bhoy?”

“The very thing in my mind, Timothy. I’ll tell you when we have had our ‘parritch.’ We were not born to spend useful careers in the Doldrums. Let us remember it after breakfast.”

They had stretched a friendly awning over the aft deck, and hereunder we took our coffee and such food as a man cared to eat in such a temperature. When breakfast was done and we had lighted the morning cigarette, delicious beyond words under such circumstances, I began to speak very frankly to Timothy and the Captain of our present situation and the impossibility of continuing it further.

“The obstinate man is about to surrender to his friends,” I said. “We have now been running to and fro between Porto Grande and this Styx of an ocean for nearly a month. We have sailed half-way to the Brazils and back, and discovered no more traces of the Diamond Ship than of the barque which Jason steered. When I consented to quit Villa do Porto, I believed that the Jew, Valentine Imroth, would be taken afloat in the vessel we saw when first we returned from South Africa. I still believe it—but what is the good of belief when the ocean guards his secret and no eyes of ours can pry it out? He has escaped us, vanished in a cloud, and left us to gird at ourselves for the precious weeks we have lost. It may be that my deductions were wrong from the first, that he has fled to Paris or to America, and that the Diamond Ship is safely in some harbour where no civilised Government will find her. In that case our patrol is doubly futile. We are giving him time to perfect his plans, while we keep from the authorities that personal account of our investigations to which they are entitled. These conclusions compel me most reluctantly to assent to your wishes and to return. We have failed upon the high seas. Let us now discover what the shore has to tell us.”

They heard me with evident pleasure. Loyal as the men had been all along, these weary weeks of fruitless pursuit could not but tell their tale upon them. When we sailed away from Villa do Porto and raced to the Southern Atlantic, it was in the minds of all of us that we should track down the Jew successfully in as many days as we had now devoted weeks to a futile quest. All the arguments were upon my side. If the unknown vessel harboured Imroth’s rogues, and not them alone, but the fruits of their robberies, then it was plain that she must abide at least for a time in the situation where we had first discovered her. How could her communication with the shore be established otherwise? Relief ships from Europe would be visiting her constantly. She must be provisioned, coaled, and kept aware of what was going on ashore. It seemed impossible to me that she could shift her present cruising ground or make any wide detour until open pursuit compelled her to do so. These reasons had kept me doggedly to my quest of her. But they had failed to satisfy my comrades, and there were other impulses bidding me return.

“It is hard to give it up, doctor,” said Captain Larry when I had done; “but really, I think you are right. If the Government had sent out a ship to help us, the course would have been plain enough. As it is, we can do nothing even if we track them down, and we might lose valuable lives in the endeavour. Get back to Portsmouth and leave it to the Government. That’s my word, and that, I think, is



what Mr. McShanus thinks. We have done all we can, and a precious sight more than most would have done.”

“Ay, and ’tis sense the man speaks,” added McShanus. “The last man in the world would I be to cry off while the fox is running; but, Ean, me bhoy, he’s gone to ground as sure as blazes, and what for would ye flog a good horse to death? Here’s a fortune spent in coal, and a sea hot enough to fry haddocks, and divil of a sign as much as of a row-boat. The Captain’s not behind me in knowing of other people who have a claim upon your consideration. Go to Europe and learn of their welfare. There is one who may need ye sorely. And poor talk will it be that you’ll hear then if they tell you of ‘what might have been.’ Go back to Europe, say I, and learn what has become of Joan Fordibras. ’Tis better work than roasting like a heathen nigger on this blazer of an ocean.”

Well, we were agreed finely, as you will see. But the determination, none the less, had its counterpoise of depression which is not difficult to apologise for. It is in the British blood to persist even when failure seems assured and hope has long been abandoned. We had set out to find the Diamond Ship, and we had failed. That she was still afloat upon the Southern Atlantic remained my unalterable conviction. It was even possible that Joan Fordibras was aboard her, and not in Europe at all. A Council of Prudence said, “Return”; a Vanity of Conviction said, “Go on.” I had listened to the voice of the first-named and surrendered to it. My comrades professed their joy in tones becoming a graveyard. The men heard of our determination with hands thrust deep into their pockets and mouths which emitted surly clouds of smoke. Rarely has a homeward-bound ship carried heavier hearts or a crew as silent. We were going to see the white cliffs of England again; but we were leaving the Diamond Ship for others to take. Everyone, professing to be glad, remained conscious of a personal defeat, of a rebuff which should not have been, and would not have been, but for a caprice of Fortune, unlooked for and unmerited.

Upon my own part, there were conflicting hopes and desires which I could have confessed to none. It certainly had been a blow upon my vanity that the Admiralty had sent no ship to my assistance, and that Scotland Yard had been so long bestirring itself. What could their delay mean but incredulity? They doubted my story, or if they did not doubt it, then they were wasting the precious weeks in vain inquiries at the consulates or formal exchange with the Governments. In due season they would act, when the Diamond Ship had made her last voyage, perhaps, and the master criminal stood beyond their reach. Val Imroth, indeed, appeared to me to be the beginning and the end of this great conspiracy. The others were the puppets with which this king of rogues played a game daring beyond all imagination of meaner minds. Let him be caught, and the house of his crimes would be shattered to ruins. He was the Alpha and the Omega, the brain and the soul of it. I concerned myself with no other—even little Joan must stand in peril until he were taken. My sense of duty forbade another course; I dare not turn aside.

Many a night and oft when the glorious Southern sky looked down upon us, and the sea was still, and nothing but the purring voice of the steamer’s engines could be

heard, had I, alone upon the aft deck, asked myself of Joan's fate and of the future which awaited her. Had the rogues discovered her that night I fled from the Valley House, or had she been spirited away before Okyada came to me? Was it a man's part to have left the island immediately, or should I have lingered on in the hope of seeing her? I know not to this day.

If a man's love make claim upon sentiment alone and not upon common-sense, then must I be found blameworthy. But if he is to use his brains as much in an affair of the heart as in that of the common things of the day, then was I justified a thousand times. Again and again did reason tell me that the Jew would hold her as a hostage for his own safety; and that no harm would befall her until danger threatened him. Let me come face to face with him, and then I might fear for her. Alas! that reason cannot always be a comforter. There were blacker hours when I depicted her the prey of the ruffians of the island, the victim of her foster-father's savage anger, alone and defenceless amongst them all, looking for my coming, and crying in her despair because I did not come. These were the blacker hours, I say. Let the long spell of waiting answer for them. They vanished like the mist when the good news came.

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We set the yacht upon a northward course, and lived through a morning of angry silence. Disdaining any lunch but a biscuit and a proud cigar, Timothy McShanus fell to reminiscences. I remember he discussed the law of chances, reminding me of the American citizen, who, being asked if he were a lucky man, replied that he once held four aces at a game of poker in Mexico City, and only got one shot in the leg. In a lachrymose mood, Timothy went on to say that he cared little whether he lived or died, but that he would give much to know what they were doing at the Goldsmith Club in London town. I did not answer him, for at that moment Captain Larry came scurrying along the deck, and one look at his face told me that he had news of moment.

"Well, Larry—and now?"

"There is a message, sir."

"A message?"

"I don't know what to say, sir. The telegraph instruments are going like one o'clock. I thought you had better know immediately. There's no one else aboard can read them."

My rough exclamation astonished them both. Our Marconi instruments had always been a pleasant source of mystery to the crew, and even the Captain regarded them with some little awe. Hitherto we had hardly made use of them at all, exchanging, I think, but a couple of messages—one with a P. & O. steamer and another with a Union boat. And now they spoke for the third time, not from any ocean-going ship, I felt sure, nor from any station ashore, but a voice from the unknown, pregnant of good or ill, it might be, beyond any power of the imagination to say. Be it said that I went below with an anxiety, an excitement of the news

baffling words. Was it possible that this implement of steel and brass, of wire and filings, and the simplest electric batteries, would reveal the truth so long concealed? Even that I dared to hope.

Now, the second officer watched the instrument and his curiosity was natural enough. I caught him when I entered the fore cabin where we had set it up, in the act of trying to send some signal in reply, and arrested him with so rough a hand upon his own that he must have believed me bereft suddenly of my senses.

“Good God!” I cried. “Not a word, man—not a word. This may be life or death to us. Leave it alone—let them speak before we answer.”

“The instrument has been going for five minutes, sir. I know something of the Morse code, but I can’t make head or tail of it. She’s not a P. & O. ship, sir.”

“Neither a P. & O. nor any other letters in our alphabet, my lad. Go down now to Mr. Benson, the engineer, and tell him to give an eye to the batteries and the coherer. I will see to this.”

He left me, and I took my stand before the implement, and watched it as a man watches a human face wherein he may read the story of his fate. A message was being ticked out there, but so faintly, so absolutely inaudible, that no skill of mine could write it down. Far away from us, it might be, some hundreds of miles away, an unknown ship flashed its news over the lonely ocean. What ship, then, and whose were the voices? Fascinated beyond expression, I stood a long hour by the instrument and could hear my own heart beating with the excitement of suspense. Would the unknown never speak plainly? Should I risk a question in answer, sent out from our own lofty mast where all had been prepared for such a seeming miracle as this? And if so, what question? Had the Jew a password upon the high seas of which I was not the possessor. I knew not what to think. One man alone upon the yacht might speak at such an hour—young Harry Avenhill, who, silently, willingly, and in gratitude had worked with our engineers during these long weeks of the vain pursuit.

Harry came up to me from the depths of the engine room, his face a little pallid, but his eyes a clearer, healthier blue than when I had taken him from England and given him that second chance which humanity owes to every lad who sins. He told me frankly that there had been a password in use both in England and France.

“We used to have to write the letter ‘A’ five times running from the bottom, left-hand, to the top right-hand of a slip of paper, sir. That was when we wanted to get into any of our houses in London or Paris or Brussels. If we met a friend in the streets, it was the Romany tongue we spoke—*Kushto bokh* or *mero pal*, or something of that sort—and when we had said it, one or other asked how old Five A’s was doing. Once I remember the password was ‘Fordibras.’ That was at Blois when we robbed the house of the Count of Sens, who had just bought some of the Empress’s emeralds. I never remember it being used anywhere else but there.”

I smiled, for the Jew’s perspicuity was as evident here as it had been in England and upon the island. The weaker man, Hubert Fordibras, he who by subtle cleverness and canting self-deception tried to believe himself innocent of these

crimes, he would be the first prize of the police when detection came. This was obvious—as obvious as the lad’s inability to help me.

“It will not be ‘Fordibras’ upon the high seas, nor will a whole alphabet of ‘A’s’ help us, Harry,” said I, as kindly as I could. “But that’s not your fault, my lad. Had you gone aboard with them, it would have been a different story. There is some password, I am sure, and it is used only for the ships. As it is, I must go wanting it—a hundred thousand pities, if pity is ever any use to anybody.”

“Then you never met one of their sailors, Doctor Fabos?”

“No, I never—Good God! what am I saying? Never met one of their sailors? Harry, what made you ask me that question?”

“You think of everything, sir. I made sure you would have been aboard one of their ships.”

“I have not been aboard one of their ships, but—well, we shall see. Who knows, Harry, but that you were to be the destiny of this? Go up to Captain Larry and tell him that I have news for him and for Mr. Benson. It may not be Europe after all.”

He went away as quietly as he had come and left me to the instruments. That which was in my mind I would share with none. Say that it was an idea which might win or lose all by a word and you will come near to its discovery. My purpose was to send by wireless telegraphy such a message to the Diamond Ship as would lead us to the discovery both of her present situation and her ultimate destination. To do this, I needed a password to the confidence of her commander. That password I believed that I possessed. It had been given to me years gone when a dead sailor had been washed ashore upon Palling beach, and one of the most famous diamonds in Europe had been found upon his body. Judge of my excitement when I sat down to put this idea to the proof. There before me was the instrument still ticking a message I could not decipher. I sat down before our own keyboard and deliberately rapped out the words, “Captain Three Fingers.” Again and again I sent the words speeding across the lonely seas. “Captain Three Fingers”—that, and nothing more. As a spirit winging a human thought it went, to the unknown, over the silent waters, a tremor of the air, a voice of doom, an awful, mysterious power of words pregnant of discovery or wholly impotent in the mocking ether.

An hour passed, and found me still alone. There had been no response to my message, no further agitation of the receiver whose message baffled me. Faithful to my wish, neither Larry nor McShanus had interrupted me. I could hear as a distant sound the murmur of gentle seas beating upon our bows. The purr of our engines was as that of a living, sentient entity, awake to the intervals of action. My fingers had grown weary of repeating those idle words. I sat back in my chair in a bitterness of spirit foreign to me, and reflected upon the fatuity of impulse and the mockery of all human deduction. If there were a password to the deck of the Diamond Ship, I lacked it. My hasty conclusions had met with their just fate. The men aboard the distant vessel had taken alarm and signalled to me no more. What would it profit them to continue this vain employment? Answer, that obstinacy prompted me. Doggedly, persistently, reason would repeat that I was right. The words were the

only words. I could imagine no others. In mockery almost I changed my key, and to prove myself right, a hundred times I tapped out the word "Fordibras" upon the ready instrument. Once, twice, thrice—thus it went speeding into the aerial wastes, losing itself under the blue heavens, a delusion upon a delusion, the mocking jest of a man who had no resource but jest. And how are wonder and the sport of chance to be expressed when I say that the word was answered, immediately, clearly, beyond all question—in a message from the Diamond Ship and from those who commanded her.

I sat as one transfixed, my hands trembling with excitement, my ears intent as though open to the story of a miracle. Plain as the talk of a friend at my side came that memorable answer, "How is old Five A's doing?" Leaping to the lad Harry's story, I answered them in the Romany tongue—the first, perhaps, that any student of crime should begin to learn. And now it became no longer a question of the word. Their anxiety mastered them. They were telling me their secrets across the waste—those secrets I would have paid half my fortune to learn.

"We lie at 90° 15' by 35° 15' 15". Where are you?"

I flashed back a false reply, two degrees northward of our true situation. Quick as the instrument would transmit the words, I added this intelligence:

"Every port watched. Fabos in Paris; white ensign off St. Michael's; station safe; wait coming."

Their reply was the impatient question:

"Are you Ross or Sycamore?"

I took it to mean that there were two ships for which they waited, and that the captains thereof were named respectively Ross and Sycamore. At a hazard, I chose the first name, and waited for them to go on. Never in all this world did the flashing voice of electricity mean so much to mortal man.

"We are short of coal and water," the tidings went. "Hurry, for God's sake, or we are driven into Rio."

To this, my hands hot with the fever of discovery, I rejoined:

"Rio known—keep the seas; we reach you to-morrow."

And then for a long while there was silence. I imagined that unknown crew debating my words as though they had been a message of their salvation. A relief ship was coming out to them. They were saved from the perils of the shore and that more terrible peril of thirst. When the machine next ticked out its unconscious confession, it was to bid me hasten, for God's sake.

"I am Valentine Imroth. What has kept you ashore?"

"The police and Fabos."

"Then Fordibras is a traitor!"

"You have his daughter with you?"

"Is that known in Europe?"

"It is suspected."

"By the mouth of Fabos. He has received my message. Has Sycamore sailed?"

"He is two days behind me."

“What coal has he aboard?”

I sat back from the instrument and answered not a word. Be it said that, directly I had already convinced myself that this mysterious unknown Diamond Ship was in reality a vessel hauled to, as it were, permanently in mid-Atlantic, the corollary of attended steamers needed no demonstration. Regularly from Europe or America, I imagined, tenders of considerable size set out to water, provision, and to coal the great receiving hulk wherein the Jew hid his booty and harboured his outcasts. There would be a great going to and fro of rascals, of course, relief crews, and a very system of changing duties. But the great ship would never make the shore unless driven thereto by ultimate necessity; and the very fact of those equatorial latitudes being chosen for her cruising ground, latitudes of profound calm and void of winds, contributed to the probability of my surmise. So much was plain—but the moment the arch-rogue asked me what coal the tender carried, then instantly I realised my peril and quitted the instrument abruptly. Of the tender I knew nothing. A false word might undo all that accident had done for me so nobly. I had wisdom enough to draw back from it.

“They will set it down either to prudence or a bad receiver,” I said to myself as I quitted the cabin, in a greater state of mental agitation than I had known since I sailed from England. “It could not be better. Let them flash what news they will, I have their story, and to-morrow Europe shall have it too.”

Larry was on the quarter-deck when I went aft and Timothy McShanus stood at his side. I was astonished to hear that it was already six o’clock and to see the sun setting. Together, my best of friends remarked on the pallor of my face, and asked me what, in heaven’s name, had kept me so long in the cabin.

“Gentlemen,” I said, “the Diamond Ship is some hundred odd miles from us as we lie, and Joan Fordibras and the Jew are aboard her. Captain Larry, will you give the necessary orders? and, Timothy, for God’s sake, send me up a whisky-and-soda and the longest cigar on the yacht. I am going to think, man—I am going to think.”

So I turned upon my heel and left him. The men’s cheers resounded through the ship as I entered my cabin. Ah! the brave fellows. Toward what harbour had they turned the yacht’s head so resolutely? Might it not be to a haven of death, to a grave in that placid ocean upon which we now raced as though Eldorado lay beyond our dim horizon?

I knew not, indeed. For upon me also the fever of pursuit had again laid its burning hand, and though death stood at our helm, no voice of life might call me back.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### A PILLAR OF LIGHT.

“*White Wings*” Dares a Venture.

Merry, our little cockney cook—the aproned humbug pretends to be a Frenchman—swore that night by the shade of Carême that if ever he made a *ragoût à la truffe à Perigord* again for a master who dined off whisky-and-soda and a cigar, “e ’oped he would be ’ung on a pot-’ook.” I solaced the good fellow by ordering supper at eleven o’clock, and inviting both Larry and Benson, our engineer, to my table. Needless to say that we had but one topic of conversation. Hardly were the glasses filled when I began to put my laconic questions, and wrote upon the slip of note at my side the answers to them.

“For how many days have you coal, Mr. Benson?”

“That depends how far and how fast you steam, sir.”

“Suppose that we are lying drifting here in these calms. There is no great consumption of coal then?”

“No, sir; but if you wish steam kept up against a run, that empties your bunkers.”

“It will depend upon what the other people can do, Benson. They may be in the same position as we are. If our friends at home believe our story, I don’t suppose there will be much coal going for Val Imroth or any of his company. Of course, he may have other resources. He would not rely upon relief ships from Europe altogether. The American governments are not likely to concern themselves overmuch in the matter. Their newspapers will make as much of the matter as the police will make little. Incredulity we must expect. If we are believed anywhere, it will be by the men who lose hundreds of thousands of pounds every year in South Africa. That’s the keynote to this mystery. The Jew may have a hundred agents stealing diamonds for him at Kimberley, he hides the men and the booty on this great moored ship until the danger has passed. A hint to those pleasant people, the magnates of Park Lane, will supply money enough for any purpose. I doubt their sense, however. They will leave the protection of their so-called interests to other people, as they have always done. We really need not consider them in the matter.”

“’Tis yourself and the young lady ye have to think of—no others,” interrupted Timothy. “Phwat the divil is Park Lane to you or to me or to any decent man? Do we care whether their diamonds are safe or stolen? Not a tinker’s curse, me bhoy. If ye hunt the Jew down, ’tis for your vanity’s sake and not for the good of humanity at all. Faith, I’d be a fool to tell ye ’tis not so. Ye want the glory of this, and ye want the girl on top of the glory. Let’s be plain with each other, and we’ll get on the

faster.”

“Timothy,” I said, “you are a philosopher. We won’t quarrel about it. The glory of it is nothing to you, and if it were in your power, you’d return to Europe by the first steamer willing to carry you there. Let us agree to that.”

“Be d——d to it. I agree to nothing of the sort.”

“Ah, then here is Madame Vanity sheltered also in another human bosom. Say no more. If I am serious, it is to tell you that vanity has been less to me in all this time than the safety of Joan Fordibras and her freedom. Of that, I account myself the guardian. She is on board the Diamond Ship—reflect among what a company of villains, thieves, and assassins. Captain, Timothy, I have not the courage to tell myself what may befall her. Perhaps it would be better if she did not live to speak of it. You know what it may be. You must try to help me where my judgment fails.”

“To the last man on the ship,” said Captain Larry very solemnly.

Timothy did not reply. Emotional, as all Irishmen are, he heard me in a silence which spoke very eloquently of his affection. For my own part, I am no lover of a public sentiment. My friends understood what Joan’s safety meant to me, and that was sufficient.

“We should sight the ship after eight bells,” said I, diverting the subject abruptly, “and then our task begins. I am hoping to outwit them and to force a surrender by sheer bluff. Very possibly it will fail. We may even lose the yacht in the venture. I can promise nothing save this—that while I live I will hunt the Jew, afloat or ashore. Let us drink to that, gentlemen, a bumper. It may be the last occasion we shall find for some days to come.”

We filled our glasses and drank the toast. A willing steward carried my orders for a double dose of grog for the men, and an echo of the chantey they lifted came down to us as we sat. It was now nearly midnight, and yet no one thought of bed. An excitement which forbade words kept us there, talking of commonplace affairs. When the second officer informed me, exactly at eight bells, that the telegraph was working again and very clearly, I heard him almost with indifference. For the moment it might be dangerous to send any message across the waste of waters. There could be no further talk exchanged between the Jew and myself until I had definitely declared myself.

“They would shift their position, Captain. We must hold them to it and track them down. You think that we should sight them at two bells in the middle watch. I’ll step down and hear what they have to say, but unless it is vital I shall not answer them.”

I found the instrument tapping sharply as the second officer had said. The words spelled out “Colin Ross,” the name of the officer upon one of their relief ships, as they had already informed me. Repeated again and again, it gave me in the end an idea I was quick to act upon. They must think the relief steamer broken down, I said. Such should be the first card I had to play.

“Fordibras,” I signalled, and again “Fordibras,” and then upon it the simple words, “propeller shaft broken—all hands at work—repaired to-morrow—cable



eight bells.”

I say that I repeated the message, as one almost invariably is called upon to do when the instrument is wireless and no receivers have been tuned to a scheme. A little to my astonishment, there was no reply whatever. As I had ceased to speak to the Diamond Ship yesterday, so she had ceased to speak to me to-night. A renewal of the call earned no better reward. I fell to the conclusion that the news had been so astounding that the man who received it went headlong to the captain of the vessel, and that an answer would be returned anon. So half an hour passed and found me still waiting. It must have been nearly one o'clock by this time. I recollect that it was seventeen minutes past one precisely when our forward “look-out” discerned the lights of the Diamond Ship upon a far horizon, and Captain Larry burst in upon me with his splendid news. Now, surely, had I no further need of messages. You may judge how I followed him to the deck to feed my eyes upon the spectacle.

“Have you just seen her, Larry?”

“This very instant, doctor. I could not have fallen down the stairs quicker.”

“Does McShanus know?”

“He’s shaking all over—like a man with an ague. I sent him to the cabin for brandy.”

“It could be no other ship, Larry?”

“How could it be, sir? This is no course for anywhere. She’s what we’re after, right enough.”

“Does she lie far off, Larry?”

“I can’t say, sir. You shall judge for yourself.”

I went up upon the bridge with him for a better view, and immediately discerned the spectacle which had so excited him. Many miles away, as I judged, upon our port-bow, a light flashed out brilliantly above a sleeping ocean; a blinking, hovering, mad-cap light, now turning its glowing face to a fleecy sky, now making lakes of golden fire upon the glassy water, now revolving as in some mighty omnivorous circle which should embrace all things near and far and reveal their presence to watching eyes. Plainly directed by a skilful hand, I said that a trained officer worked the lantern as they work it on board a man-of-war; but as though to deny that the unknown ship was a man-of-war, the monster searchlight began anon to answer as though to a dancing, drunken measure of some hand that wearied of duty and made a jest of it. Not for one minute would this have been permitted upon the deck of a battleship. I could doubt no longer that Captain Larry spoke the truth.

“We are carrying no lights ourselves, Larry?” I exclaimed presently, and added apologetically, “that goes without saying.”

“It goes without saying, doctor. I ordered lights out at eight bells.”

“We shall show a haze of red light above our funnels?”

“Not with those guards to port Mr. Benson has fitted up.”

“Do you think we dare run up to her, Larry?”

“There would be little risk when they get tired of their fireworks, doctor.”

“We’ll do it, Larry. Don’t forget Joan Fordibras is aboard there. I would give

much for one spoken word that she could understand.”

He nodded significantly, and as he rang down his orders to the engine-room I perceived that McShanus had come up from the saloon. He did not speak to me, as he told me afterwards, being under the ridiculous apprehension, which comes to men in danger, that any speech above a whisper is a peril. The men themselves were all grouped about the fo’castle like children for a stage-play to be given on the water. We carried no lights. From stem to stern of the ship not so much as a single electric lamp broke in upon the darkness. The clash of our engines remained the only sound. I turned to Timothy and astonished him by my greeting.

“A steady hand now, is it that, Timothy?”

“Take a grip of it yourself, me bhoy.”

“It certainly is not the cold hand of the poets. Would it help with the machine guns if need be, Timothy?”

“Whist!—could it not! Are ye not speaking over-loud, doctor, me bhoy?”

“Oh, come, you think they can hear us five miles away, Timothy. Shout if you like, old boy. I hope to God there will be silence enough by-and-by. We are going to have a look at them, Timothy. ’Tis to learn the colour of their coats, as you would say.”

“Ye are not going within shot of their guns?”

“Timothy,” I said, speaking in that low tone he had desired. “I am going to learn how it fares with Joan Fordibras.”

“Ah, bad cess to it, when a woman holds the lantern—there goes Jack the Giant-killer. ’Twill help her to be sunk, Ean.”

“I do not think they will sink us, Timothy.”

“God be good to me. I’m no better than a coward this night. What was it I said?”

“That you were quite of my opinion, Timothy.”

We laughed together, and then fell to silence. Fitfully now in the dark heavens there could be seen the glimmer of the searchlight’s open lantern. The sea about us was a sea of night, very black and awesome and still. We were a thing of darkness, rushing onward with spinning bows and throbbing turbines and furnaces at a white heat—a stealthy enemy creeping upon our prey through the immense shadows which darkened the face of the resting waters. No man aboard disguised from himself the risk we were taking. Let the Diamond Ship catch us in the path of her mighty beam of radiant light, and we were instantly discovered. A single shell from her modern guns would destroy us utterly. There could be no greater triumph for the Jew than that. We alone carried the whole story of his secret. What, then, would he not give to destroy us?

So we crept on, mile by mile. Every eye aboard the *White Wings* watched that resting searchlight as though it had been endowed with telepathic powers and would of itself warn the rogue’s crew. I don’t think we believed for an instant in the good fortune which followed us. It seemed incredible that they should not keep a better look-out—and yet the fact so stands. The resting beam of light in the sky was our goal. We drew upon it moment by moment as to some gate of destiny which should

tell a story fruitful beyond any we had heard. And still the Diamond Ship did not awake.

I heard Captain Larry give an order down the tube, and realised that the yacht had come to a stand. We were then but half a mile from the great vessel herself, and could in reason dare to draw no nearer. The rest lay with the whim of the night. We knew not, could not imagine the strange fortune which awaited us.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE CRIMSON ROCKET.

#### *Joan Fordibras is Discovered on the Diamond Ship.*

You are to imagine a still sea and a great four-masted sailing ship drifting upon it at the hazard of a summer breeze. The night is intensely dark, and the sky gives veins of mackerel cloud upon a field of slaty blue. Far away, a ring of silver iridescence, low down upon an open horizon, suggests that great inverted bowl within which all ships are ever prisoned from the first day of their sailing to the last. The monster vessel herself is brilliantly lighted from stem to stern. Faintly over the water there comes to us a sound of bibulous song and hilarity. My quick ear catches the note of a piccolo, and upon that of a man's voice singing not untunefully. I say that there is no discipline whatever upon such a deck; no thought of danger, no fear of discovery. The pillar of light has become a halting mockery. Much is to be dared, much to be won upon such a night.

“Consider”—and this I put to Captain Larry—“they have guns, but who has trained their gunners? Let them fall to artillery practice, and it is two to one they blow up the ship. Even one of Percy Scott's miracles would make no certainty of such a yacht as this on such a night. We ought to risk it, Captain—we ought to risk it for a woman's sake.”

Larry was a brave enough man, but, like all his race, a very prudent one.

“If you wish it, sir. But there are the men to think of. Don't forget the wives and children at home, sir.”

“Did the men so put it, Larry?”

“Bless you, no, sir, they'd swim aboard there if I gave the word.”

I reflected upon it a little while, and it seemed to me that Larry must be right. Accustomed to work alone and to be the arbiter of all risks, I had for the instant forgotten my responsibilities toward those who served me so well. By no necessity to be named, by no duty to humanity or to myself, could I ask these honest fellows to go further with me. Even where we lay, a lucky shot might destroy us. Half a dozen times in as many minutes my heart was in my mouth as the great beam of light marked another point in the heavens or momentarily disappeared. Let them cast its effulgent beams again upon the waste of waters, and assuredly were we discovered. Not alone in the reflection, I could read it also upon the set faces of my friends. A telepathic sense of danger held us mutually entranced. The villains over yonder had made an end of their music. Instinct said that they would search the seas again, and so unmask us.

It is futile, in my opinion, for any writer to attempt to describe the particular

sensations, either of exhilaration or of terror, which come to him in moments of great peril. Should he set down the truth, he is named either a boaster or a liar; if he would evade the truth, his story can be but commonplace. To a close friend I would say that when the looked-for event happened, when the rogues at last turned their searchlight upon the waves again, I had no thought at all of the consequences of discovery, but only a fascinating curiosity of the eyes which followed the beam wonderingly, and stood amazed when it passed over us. Vast, monstrous, blazing, the fearful eye of light focussed itself upon us for a terrible instant, and then swept the whole circle of the seas with its blinding beams. Twice, thrice, it went thus, hearts standing still almost as it approached us, leaping again as it passed onward. Then, as surprisingly, it remained fixed upon the further side of the Diamond Ship, and in the same instant, far away to north-west, a crimson rocket cleaved the black darkness of the night, and a shower of gold-red balls burst hoveringly above the desert waters.

“What do you make of that, Larry?”

“Not a signal from any common ship, sir. We don’t use that kind of rocket.”

“’Tis the fourth of July, bedad, or the Crystal Palace that’s flying!” cried Timothy.

“Larry,” said I, “that’s one of their patrols. I rather fancy a man of the name of Colin Ross is aboard her. If so, the Jew is to receive some shocks.”

“I wish to heaven they came by way of a seaman’s arm, sir. Yes, it’s as you say. Yon is a steamer, and here goes the answering rocket.”

He pointed to the sky above the Diamond Ship, ablaze with a spray of vivid green radiance, the answering signal to the distant ship. The nature of our own escape now became quite clear to me. The look-outs over yonder had espied the lights of the relief steamer and had used the searchlight to signal her. The great arcs, the circling beams, were but those preliminary movements with which every operator tries the lantern he is about to use. No eye had followed their aureole, I made sure. We had escaped observation simply because every man aboard yonder vessel had been looking at the incoming steamer, bearing from Europe news which might be of such moment.

“Larry,” I said, jumping at the idea of it; “it’s now or never. Let her go while they are at the parley. I’ll stake my life on it there is no look-out to starboard. Let’s have a look at them when they least expect us.”

“Do you mean to say, sir, that you’ll risk it?”

“There is no risk, Larry—if you don’t delay.”

“I do believe you are right, sir. Here’s for it, anyway, and luck go with us.”

He rang down the order to the engine-room, and we raced straight ahead, not a man uttering a sound, not a light showing aboard us. Holding on in defiance alike of prudence and responsibility, we drove the yacht into the very shadows of the great unknown ship we had tracked so far. To say that we stood within an ace of destruction would be to treat of our circumstances lightly. A word amiss might have destroyed us so utterly that not a man of us all should have told the tale. There,

towering above us, was the great hull of this floating mystery, the massive outline of a vessel built upon the lines of an Atlantic steamer, yet carrying four masts and a funnel so low that one might look twice to detect it at all. Flashing lights from stem to stern, we could almost count the men upon the decks of this phantom of the high seas—men wearing all varieties of dress: some the garb of fashion, some that of ordinary workmen, a few in the uniform of sailors. And what a hive of activity those decks appeared to be! How the fellows were running to and fro—changing their positions every moment, taking their stands now in the shrouds, now high upon the fo'castle—an agitated, expectant throng, turning, as it were, but one face to the steamer which came to relieve them and by which news of their safety or their danger might come. Their very interest, however, became our confidence. Taking my place with the forward look-out, I conned every feature of the great ship, and impressed the facts of it upon my memory. No thought of peril troubled me now.

I scanned the decks, I say, as quietly as one surveys a ship that must be docked; noted the black shapes of the veiled guns, the wretched haphazard armament amidships, the unsuitability of the great hull to the purposes now indicated, the seeming absence of all order and method and even of leadership upon its decks. This monstrous floating haven of crime and horror—no sailor had chosen it for its present purpose, I made sure. In a lighter moment, I could say that it had once been a second-class cruiser, and now stood for a witness to an age which added raking masts to its warships and eyed askance the supremacy of steam. The Jew, it might be, had purchased his ship from a Government that had no further use for it. He had gone to Chili or the Argentine—a second thought said to Italy, for this vessel had more than a smack of Italian design and practice as we knew it in the last days of canvas and the first of steel. And he had bought this relic at his own price, had maintained its engines, added new masts for disguise, and so adapted it to that master scheme whose aims rose so far above this evidence of realisation. All this, I say, my swift survey showed to me. But the supreme question it did not answer. There were women to be discerned upon the deck of the ship, but not the figure of Joan Fordibras. Of her the night had no news to give me.

We lay at this time, I suppose, some two hundred yards from the great ship, a little astern of her and ready, need it be said, to bound away into the darkness should the need arise. Our daring is neither to be set down to courage nor foolhardiness. It was plain that every man on board Valentine Imroth's sanctuary had eyes but for the approaching steamer, ears but for the news she would carry. Absolutely convinced of our safety, we watched the spectacle with that air of assurance and self-content which any secret agent of a good cause may assume at the moment of his triumph. My own doubt and trouble could hardly be shared by the honest fellows about me; or, if it were shared, then had they the good taste to make light of it. Indeed, they were upon the point of persuading me that, if it were Joan Fordibras I had come out to seek, then the sooner I got me back to Europe the better.

"There's no Joan upon yonder ship," said old Timothy in a big whisper. "I'd as soon look to find the Queen of Sheba there."

“Indeed, sir,” added Larry, kindly, “I do think Mr. McShanus is right. They’d never take a lady among that riff-raff. I don’t see how it would serve them, anyway. We must credit General Fordibras with some feelings if the other has none. He’s taken Miss Joan to Europe, be sure of it.”

I could make no answer, for my reasoned opinion had that obstinate dogmatism which must attend the logical idea, if logic be of any worth at all. It were better, I thought, not to discuss it, and, for that matter, there were events enough to take a man’s mind from the graver doubts. The relief steamer had by now drawn so near to the other that loud cheers were raised between them, boats put off in haste from the Diamond Ship, and boats from the newcomer. We heard greetings exchanged—in French, in German, in Italian. Instantly, too, there began a great business of making ready to unload a cargo out there in mid-Atlantic. I perceived that the two ships were to be caught together by grapplings, and so held while the affair of discharging was done. Of what the patrol’s cargo might be, I could only surmise. She would bring the invaluable coal, of course—else could not the water be distilled aboard the Rogue—coal and food and news, and, it might be, new ruffians who had escaped the justice of Europe or Africa. This, I say was a surmise. The immediate test of it my eyes carried no further, for chancing to look again at hazard toward the greater vessel, I detected a solitary figure at the taffrail, and instantly recognised my little Joan, standing apart from all that ruffian crew, and looking wistfully toward that very place where *White Wings* lay in ambush of the waters.

And then I knew that I had done well to dare this voyage, and that, cost what it might in blood or treasure, I would save this child from the Jew and that which he had prepared for her.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### WE DEFY THE ROGUES.

#### *And Receive an Ultimatum from Them.*

It is a human experience, I believe, that men's faculties often serve them best in moments of grave danger. In my own case, to be sure (but this may be a habit of the mind), I am often mastered by a strange lethargy during the hours of a common day. Events have been no other than a dreamy significance for me. I do not set them in a profitable sequence or take other than a general and an indifferent survey of that which is going on about me. But let a crisis of actual peril arrive and my mind is all awake, its judgment swift, its analysis rarely mistaken. Such a moment came to me upon the deck of the *White Wings* when I discovered my little Joan at the taffrail of the Diamond Ship and knew that my errand had not been in vain. Instantly I detected the precise nature of the risk we ran and the causes which contributed to it. The situation, hitherto vague and objectless, became as plain as the simplest sum in a child's arithmetic book.

"Larry," I said to the Captain, "they will discover our presence inside ten minutes, and we shall learn how they can shoot. This is too easy a target for my comfort. Let us back out while we have the chance."

Captain Larry, as intent upon the spectacle of the strange ship as any cabin boy, turned about quickly like a man roused up from a dream.

"I was thinking of it before the relief came alongside," said he; "the steam blast may give us away any minute, doctor. We lie right under their stern, however, and that is something. So long as they don't send their limelight whizzing——"

"That is exactly what they are about to do, Captain. They are going to look round for the unknown ship which has been sending them false messages by marconigram. Watch with me and you may follow the story. That is the first chapter of it."

I pointed to the deck of the great ship, whence the figure of my little Joan had disappeared as mysteriously as it came; and there I showed to Larry a group of men in earnest talk with a newcomer from the steamer which now lay almost alongside the larger vessel. The quick movements, the gestures of this company betrayed the curiosity which the stranger's words awakened and the astonishment that rightly followed upon it. Imagining myself to be a spy among them, I heard, in imagination, every word of that fateful conversation. "We sent no message." "You've been fooled right enough." "There's mischief afloat." "No, we had no accident—what in thunder are you talking about?—it's a lie." So the new hand must be telling the astonished crew. It needed no great prescience to say what would follow after. Even



Timothy McShanus arrived at it before I had finished.

“Would that be Colin Ross gone aboard?” he asked me, wheeling about suddenly.

I told him it would hardly be another.

“Then he’ll tell ’em the truth about the cables, or I’m a liar.”

“He will tell them the truth about the cables, and you are not a liar, Timothy. He is doing so at this very moment.”

“Faith, man, they’ll be firing shots at us then.”

“It is possible, Timothy. If you are curious on the point——”

“Curious be d——d. Would ye have me in the sea?”

“In the sea or out, I would have you keep a cool head, Timothy. They are going to fire at us, but that is not to say that they are going to hit us. Our turn comes after. Neither to-day nor to-morrow may see the end of it. I am only beginning with them, Timothy. When I have done, God help some of them, the Jew above the others. Now wait for it and see. Here’s the lantern busy. They are putting the story to the proof, you will observe. Let us hope that their astonishment may not be too much for them.”

So a commonplace chatter went on, and yet the mad intoxication of that interval of suspense had come upon us all as a fever. No man might measure his words, be sure. There we were, sagging in the trough of the seas some three hundred yards, it may be, from the great ship’s guns, our crew muttering in deep whispers, the steam hissing from our valves, the smoke drifting to the north in a dense suffocating cloud. Aware of the few moments of grace possible to us, we had given the word down to Mr. Benson to go full speed astern; and running thus for the half of a mile, we then swung the yacht round and headed due south at all the speed of which we were capable.

Now, indeed, the tense hour of our doubt began. We counted the very minutes until the beams of the monster searchlight should ensnare us once more. Brief exclamations, cheery words of hope flashing from man to man gave passage to that current of human electricity which burned up as a flame. Would the light never fall? Ay, yonder it strikes the sea, and yonder and yonder—compassing the horizon around in a twinkling, a blind glory, a very pharos of the unknown world. And now it falls upon us, and man can look upon the face of man as though he stood beneath the sun of day; and all is stillness and silence, and the unspoken question.

Far away as we were, a roar of triumph could be heard across the sea when the Jew’s ship discovered us, and the great beams of the searchlight rested upon us exultingly. In turn, the smoke from our funnel forbade us any longer to locate the enemy or to form an opinion as to his movements. Certainly, no gunshot followed immediately upon his achievement; and when a little gust of the south wind, veering a point or two, carried the loom from our furnaces away, we espied the two ships drifting as before, and even boats passing from one to the other. From this time, moreover, the darkness failed us somewhat, and a great moon tempered the ocean with its translucent beams of silvery light. Our safety lay in our speed. We burned

the precious coal without stint, since our very lives were in the furnace's keeping.

"What stops them, Larry—what are they waiting for?" I asked him presently. He had deserted the bridge and stood aft with me to watch the distant steamers. McShanus, meanwhile, paced the decks like a lion at the hour of feeding. It was his way of saying that he found the suspense intolerable.

"I don't think we shall have to wait long, sir," Larry rejoined presently. "You see, they would hardly be ready to fire their guns, and not overmuch discipline among them, I suppose. If they hit us, it will be something by way of an accident."

"And yet one that might happen, Larry. Well, here it comes, anyway. And a wicked bad shot I must say."

It was odd that they should have fired at the very moment I replied to him; yet such was the fact and such the coincidence. Scarcely had I uttered the words when a monstrous yellow flame leaped out over the bows of the Diamond Ship (which now had put about to chase us), and spreading itself abroad upon the waters left a heavy cloud of black smoke very baffling to their gunners. As for the shell, I know not to this day where it fell. We heard neither explosion nor splash; saw no spume or spray upon the hither sea, and were, not a man of us, a penny the worse for their endeavour. A second attempt achieved no better result. True, we detected the shell this time, for it fell plump into the sea, near the fifth part of a mile from our starboard quarter; but the wretched shooting, the long interval between the shots and the speed at which we travelled, inspired confidence anew, and so surely that my men began to cheer the gunners ironically, and even to flash a signal to them across the sea.

"It's as I thought, Larry," said I, "they carry a gun and have no more idea how to use it than a lady in charge of a boarding school. The Jew has been living as near to a fool's paradise as such a man is ever likely to get to paradise at all. I think we need waste no more coal. Let us lie to and take our chances. The risk is too small to think about."

"Yon man would never hit cocoanuts at a fair," chimed in McShanus, who had come up. "What will ye be flying over the ocean for? Is it coal we have to steam to China and back? Sure, the docthor is wise entirely, and be hanged to them. We lie here as safe as a babe in a mother's lap."

We laughed at his earnestness, but the order was rung down nevertheless, and presently the yacht lay rolling to the swell and we could hear the stokers drawing a furnace below. Who is justly to blame for the accident which followed I do not dare to tell myself. Sometimes I have charged myself with it and complained bitterly of the opinions I had ventured. I can only tell you that the yacht had scarcely been slowed down when the rogues' ship fired at us again, and the shot, crossing our forward decks at an angle of some fifty-five degrees, struck a fine young seaman of the name of Holland and almost annihilated him before our very eyes. The tragedy had a greater significance because of the very mirth with which we had but a moment before regarded the Jew's gunners and their performance. Death stood there upon the heels of laughter; a cry in the night was the answer to an honest man's

defiance and my own bravado. As for poor Holland, the shot took him about the middle and cut him absolutely in two. He could have suffered no pain—so instantaneously was he hurled into eternity. One moment I saw him standing at the bulwarks watching the distant searchlight; at the next, there remained but a dreadful something upon the deck from which men turned their eyes in horror and dare not so much as speak about.

You are to imagine with what consternation and dismay this accident fell upon us. For many minutes together no man spoke a word to another. Such a deathly silence came upon the ship that our own act and judgment might have brought this awful disaster, and not the play of capricious change. To say that the men were afraid is to do them less than justice. In war time, it is the earliest casualties which affright the troops and send the blood from the bravest faces. Our good fellows had gone into this adventure with me thinking that they understood its risks, but in reality understanding them not at all. The truth appalled them, drove challenge from their lips and laughter from their eyes. They were new men thereafter, British seamen, handy-men who worked silently, methodically, stubbornly as such fellows ever will when duty calls them. Had I suggested that we should return immediately to Europe they would have broken into open mutiny on the spot. Henceforth no word of mine need advocate my work or ask of them true comradeship. I knew that they would follow me to the ends of the earth if thereby they might avenge their shipmate.

“Larry,” I said, “the blame of that is upon me. God forgive my rashness. I feel as though my folly had cost me the life of one of my own sons.”

“Sir,” was his answer, “you had no more to do with it than the King himself. I will not hear such talk. The chances are the same for all of us. It might have been yourself, sir.”

McShanus was no less insistent.

“’Tis to do our duty we are here,” he said. “If there is a man among us who is ashamed of his duty, let us be ashamed of him.”

I did not answer them. The seamen, awakened from their trance, ran to the help of a comrade long past all human help. Far away over the waters, the Diamond Ship still fired her impotent shells at us. Their very impotency convinced me how surely an accident had killed poor Holland. I said that it had been the will of God, indeed, that one should perish on the altar of our justice, and his life to be the first sacrifice to be asked of us. In my own cabin, alone and bitterly distressed, a greater depression fell upon me so that I could ask myself why I had been chosen for the part at all or how it befell that of the thousands who had been robbed of Valentine Imroth, the Jew, I, alone, must set out to discover him. Vain, indeed, did triumph appear now. We had defied the rogues and they had answered us—not with a final answer, truly, but with that hush and awe of death which is never so terrible as upon the lonely waste of the great silent ocean.

Nor was the hour to pass without further news of them. Impotent at the guns, they fell to words, rapped out by our receiver so plainly that a very child of

telegraphy could have read them.

“The message of Valentine Imroth to the Englishman, Fabos.—I take up your challenge. Joan Fordibras shall pay your debt in full.”

## CHAPTER XXIV.

DAWN.

*And some Talk of a Ship that Passed in the Night.*

I have it in my mind that it was just upon the stroke of one o'clock of the morning, or two bells in the middle watch, when this amazing message came to me. Larry and the Irishman were asleep at that time, the third officer keeping the bridge and sending down to summon me to the Marconi instrument. Indefatigable as my friends had been in their energies and zeal, there are limits to human endurance which no prudent master ignores; and to their bunks I sent them despite their indignation. For myself, I can never sleep in the hour of crisis or its developments. Physically, I am then incapable of sleep. A sense of fatigue is unknown to me. I seem to be as one apart from the normal life of men, untrammelled by human necessities and unconscious even of mental effort. Perhaps the subsequent collapse is the more absolute when it comes. I have slept for thirty hours upon a question finally answered. The end of my day is the end also of whatever task I have for the time being undertaken.

The men were sleeping, and why should I awake them? Fallin, the young officer, had but little news to report. The Diamond Ship no longer wasted her shells in angry impotence. Her searchlight had ceased to play upon the moonlit waters. Such tidings as came were of a steamer's masthead light seen for an instant upon our port-bow and then vanishing.

"It's an unusual course for tramps, sir," the young officer said, "and to tell you the truth, I wasn't sure enough about it at all to wake the Captain. If it were a ship out of Buenos Ayres, she's keeping more south than usual, but I've altered the course for a star before now, and you don't care to wake up such a seaman as Captain Larry to tell him you've done that. His orders to me were to go down and report anything unusual. Well, a glimpse of a ship's light shouldn't be unusual, and that's a fact."

I agreed with him, though, landsman that I was, I thought I could read the omen better than he. If he had seen the masthead light of a strange steamer, she could be no other than the second of the relief ships the Jew awaited.

Herein lay many and disquieting possibilities. Given coal and stores enough, what was there to prevent the rogues putting in to some South American port, landing there such plunder as they had, and dispersing to the cities wherein their friends would shelter them? I foresaw immediately a complete frustration of my own plans and a conclusion to my task humiliating beyond belief. Not improbably that great hulk of a ship sailed already under the colours of some irresponsible

republic. She might, I judged, fly the Venezuelan flag or that of Honduras or Nicaragua. The ports of such governments would be ready enough to give her shelter if backsheesh enough were to hand. And what, then, of all our labours—above all, what, then, of little Joan?

This would be to say that the message still troubled me and that I had by no means come to a resolution upon it. Let it be admitted that it found me a little wanting in courage. If reason, the sober reason of one who has made it his life's task to read the criminal mind, the principles which guide it and the limits within which it is logical, if reason such as this read the Jew's ultimatum aright, then might it be derided utterly. The man would dare nothing against Joan Fordibras while an alternative remained to him. She was his last card. Should he harm her, henceforth he must become a fugitive, not from the justice of a state, but from a man's vengeance. This I plainly perceived—nevertheless, the lonely watches of the night brought me an echo of her child's voice, a word spoken as it were from a child's heart; so that I could say that the little Joan, who had turned to me in her trouble, had looked into the very eyes of my soul, that she was a prisoner yonder, alone among them all, a hostage in the hands of ruffians, their first and last hope of ultimate salvation from the gallows and the cell. She suffered—she must suffer the tortures of doubt, of suspense, it might even be of insult. And I, who had spoken such fine words, I could but rage against her persecutors, threaten them idly or write down a message of their contumely. Such was the penalty of the hour of waiting. I wonder not that I found it almost insupportable.

I have written that the third officer made his report of a strange steamer about two bells of the middle watch. Not less curious than he, I paced the bridge with him until dawn, and heard no further tidings. When Larry himself turned out, it was just before the hour of sunrise, and we stood together (McShanus coming up from the saloon with a welcome jorum of steaming coffee) to see the break of day, and to scan the face of the waters for any confirmation of the young officer's story.

How still it was, how sublime, how wonderful! Unchanging in its awe and mystery, the birth of day, whether it be viewed from the deck of a ship, the summit of a mountain, or even from the heart of a great and sleeping city, must ever remain a spectacle of transcendent beauty and majesty. It is as though the Eternal spoke to the sea and the land from the open gate of heaven itself—a command to live anew for the work of the day upon which the Holy Spirit would breathe.

On the ocean there is that added glory of a vast horizon, of the immeasurable ether and the fading magnitude of the stars. Driven back reluctantly, as the poet has written, Night draws off her armies and the sun chariots speed on. You see them afar, a glow of chill grey light beneath the vault of the stars. Winds moan fretfully; the sails above you sag and shiver; stillness falls upon the waters—a silence as profound as that of man's deepest homage. For a little while a trance has come upon things inanimate.

Little rills of foam go running to the breasts of the greater waves as cubs to the she-bear for warmth and safety. A battle is waged in the heavens, but the hosts are

hidden. The clouds labour, but are riven. An arc of golden iridescence blazons the eastern sky. Day's outposts march on to victory, and man lifts his hands to invoke their aid.

A daily scene and yet how unchangingly sublime! Standing there upon the bridge with my good friends about me, it seemed that the glory of the morn shone full upon our faces and bade us hope. No longer did the night baffle our weary eyes. We sailed a freshening sea at the splendour of the day, and far away upon the clear horizon we espied the relief ship of which our third officer had spoken.

“No star, sir, after all,” said he, “unless, that is, you would care to call her a lucky star.”

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE THRASHER AND THE WHALE.

#### *We Determine to Harass the Diamond Ship.*

The steamer, driving on rapidly to the westward, showed her hull very plainly when a quarter of an hour had passed, and was immediately named by Cain, the quartermaster, who was at the wheel, for a collier he had seen some months back at Cardiff.

“She flew the Brazilian flag, sir, and carried a Russian skipper what had a picture nose,” said he cheerily enough. “I remember the boys said that someone tattooed a bit of a circus scene on his figure-head when he was took in drink at Rio last trip. I’d have knowed the ship anywheres by that doll’s house abaft the funnel. Leastwise, if there ain’t two of ’em, she’s the same.”

His logic was commendable and we questioned him.

“Had she any arms, Cain?”

“Nothing that I see, sir, saving the shovels.”

“And you didn’t know where she was bound to?”

“They gave it out as Rio, sir. I had a bit of a tumble-to with a Portuguese steward of theirs, and I gave him Port Arthur for himself. ‘You come to Rio,’ says he, ‘and I’ll d——n well pull your nose.’ It seemed to me a long way to go for the job, sir, and that I could get it done cheaper at home. I never see him again, and next day the ship sailed.”

We laughed at his manner of telling it, but the news proved acceptable enough. I had already come to a determination, and this I communicated immediately to Larry.

“We must stop them,” I said; “if we are to save Joan Fordibras; that steamer must not put her cargo on the deck of the Diamond Ship. The risk is small enough, Captain. I think that a signal will do it—if not a signal, then a gunshot anyway. Let us put it to the proof. The success or failure will mean more than any of you imagine.”

He obeyed me without question, and we steamed straight for the tramp, steering such a course that we overtook her on the port-quarter, and so were difficult to come at by any forward gun, should she carry one. My own impression was that she did not. Her safety from inquisitorial officers in port would be better assured by the normal practice of ocean-going cargo-boats. I believed that the quartermaster had told us the truth, and upon that supposition I acted.

“Signal to her to bring to, Larry,” I said, and he assented immediately.

It was pretty to see our flags fluttering upon the breeze of morning, and to watch



the commotion upon the deck of the tramp. We knew that she had sighted us almost as soon as we set our engines going. The far horizon disclosed no trace of the Diamond Ship. We two appeared alone in all that vista of the rolling waters.

Now, the ship answered by demanding our name and our business. We could make out the figures of two or three men upon her bridge; but the crew appeared an unusually small one and the aft decks were completely deserted. To their signal we replied immediately: (1.) That Imroth, the Jew, was flying from British warships; (2.) That their own safety depended upon their immediate submission.

Not the whole truth, perhaps, and yet as I hoped truth enough. It had been in my mind all along that the Government would send at least a patrol to the seas I had named. I could not believe that, after my revelations, ports would not be watched. So I signalled this message and waited, with not a little expectation, for an answer. To my astonishment, their Captain's reply was to ask me to go aboard—meaning, of course, the master of the yacht.

“Come with me, Timothy,” said I to McShanus. “Don't talk about pistols, men. Larry will stand by for danger. We could sink them in five minutes if we had the mind—it's as safe as Rotten Row.”

“No safe place at all for a man who is susceptible to woman's beauty. Go aboard, Ean, me bhoy, I'll take your word for it when I come back.”

We put out a gangway and lowered the lifeboat from the starboard davits. The collier, lying some two hundred paces from our bows, let down a pilot's ladder for me, and I caught it as it fell, and climbed to her decks. Far down below me now, the portly Timothy asked me if I thought he was a bird. I left him, full of strange oaths, in the boat, and presented myself immediately to the captain of the steamer.

“Do you speak English?” I asked.

He shook his head and said “Nitchevo” emphatically.

A phrase in German, however, obtained an immediate answer. I perceived him to be a coarsely built man of some fifty years of age, his nose scarred roughly by a seaman's needle, as the quartermaster Cain had told me, and his manner as threatening and full of bluster as his master the Jew could have wished.

“What's your business with me?” he asked—while his clumsy fingers fondled a revolver he carried in his breeches pocket.

“To keep your neck out of the noose,” said I, without any preface whatever. “Your game is up and Val Imroth taken. That's what brought me here.”

He spat on the deck and called a mate to him—another Russian no more beautiful than he. For a few moments they conversed together in a dialect I could make nothing of. It was plain that while my story astounded them beyond measure, they were by no means ready to believe it. And so they fell to bluff, which would not have deceived a child.

“What's this man to me?” the Captain asked; “am I his servant?”

“Undoubtedly, since you carry coal to his ship.”

“Suppose I tell you to go to h—ll and mind your own business?”

“In that case, you might arrive at the destination before me. I am going to give

you ten minutes. If you are not steaming eastward at the end of that time, I promise you that I will most certainly send you to the bottom. Reflect upon it calmly. You cannot help the Jew, but may save yourselves. I'll tell you something else. If you have any coal to sell, I am a buyer. Now do not finger that pistol of yours, for it might go off, and as sure as God's in heaven, if it did, this crew would be on the floor of the Atlantic in less than five minutes. Rattle your senses, my man, and speak up. If yonder warship spies us out, she'll not deal so tenderly with you. What is the Jew to you, and why should you sell your liberty for him? Come, think of it. I am not a patient man, but I will give you time enough not to make a fool of yourself."

They were brazen words, upon my life. When I pointed westward to a loom of smoke upon the horizon scarcely bigger than a man's hand—when I did this, and spoke in the same breath of a warship, then, surely, the ingenuity of suggestion could go no further. As for the rascally Russian, I saw that he was struck all of a heap. His eyes had already told him that the yacht, *White Wings*, carried machine guns and a torpedo tube. Perhaps he argued that even if he raced for it, we could sink him before the Diamond Ship so much as sighted him—and this was to assume that a haze of smoke upon the horizon indicated the presence of the Jew's vessel, and not of a British warship. In either case he found himself between the devil and the deep sea; and, be sure, I lost no minute of a precious opportunity.

"The game is up," I resumed, "and your friend, the Jew, is about to pay the price of it. If you wish to contribute your share, go on and join the fun. I don't suppose the police care much about such riff-raff as you have on board here. Get them back to Cardiff and let them find new ships. You are thinking of the money—well, if you can fill my bunkers yonder, I will pay a long price for the stuff you carry—down on your table in English sovereigns."

At this he regarded me very curiously. A dull head is often obstinate in suspicion. The fellow perceived his advantage and would have pressed it.

"Oh," said he, "then you are short of coal?"

"We are short of coal," I rejoined, my frankness astounding him. "The others have none to spare, and if we buy none of you, we must run to Porto Grande. In that case you will carry this cargo back to Europe, and be arrested when you step ashore. I shall see to that, my man, when I touch at the islands. The police will be waiting for you, and you will get nothing—paid down and counted out. Better take my money—and ten pounds apiece for your crew—not to mention a little deal between us, which you may not find unsatisfactory."

In such a manner we wrangled and argle-bargled for the best part of an hour. Providentially, the Diamond Ship, whose smoke had at one time been visible, stood upon a westerly course, and disappeared from our ken as we talked. I found the Russian to be a low-witted, covetous fellow, not greatly to be overawed by threats, but exceedingly susceptible to the substantial facts of money. In the end, I bought what coal we could carry from him at a price which I would cheerfully have doubled. And, indeed, I do think that it was one of the best day's work I ever did in

all my life. To cut off the Jew's patrol, to fill our own bunkers with his precious steam coal, carried at such risk from Cardiff; to send the tramp steamer back again whence she came—even the matter-of-fact Larry could find no word to fit it. As for my poor friend Timothy, his emotions were altogether too much for him.

"Docter," said he, "I doubt your salvation, and that's the truth of it. Say that we are going back to dine on the Jew's ship and I'll believe ye entirely. 'Twould not be more wonderful than that which these poor old eyes are showing me."

I told him not to make a fool of himself, but to serve his turn as sentinel while we brought the yacht alongside the collier, and took in coal from her. Treachery might yet be planned against us, though I doubted it. We posted an armed guard upon the bridge, and stripped our forward guns of their covers—the swell ran kindly and the sea was like a mirror. Hardly believing their own eyes but obeying me nevertheless, our good fellows set to work like niggers, and filled our bunkers with the precious stuff. It had been at seven bells of the morning watch when they began; it was three of the afternoon before they had done. The coal shoots with which the tramp was provided to fill the Jew's bunkers now filled our own admirably. I paid the Russian Captain honestly, and sent him at all speed to the eastward when the business was done.

"Return as you came, and keep your mouth shut," I said: "I will answer for you to the police should the need arise. It will be your own fault if it does."

He thanked me with some civility, and I could see that he now considered himself a very fortunate fellow. To be frank, I had dismissed him utterly from my mind half-an-hour after he cast off; and the excitement of the deal having passed, I called to our steward to bring me tea to the cabin, and there we held a council, vital beyond any in its significance and its earnestness. For now we must decide, instantly and finally, what steps must be taken to save my little Joan from the devils of the Diamond Ship. How were we, the crew of a puny yacht, to bring that great hive of ruffians to book? What course dare we risk? What hope had we of any assistance from the British or other Governments? This is what we discussed when we had lighted our cigars and the tea was poured out. And this is much how the talk went:

(*Myself*.)—"We must first consider the threat. I believe that they are capable both of torturing and of killing Joan Fordibras if they are driven to it. But they will only do so in an extremity. She is their hostage. The moment that they harm her, they have done all that they can against us. If she be subject to insult meanwhile—well, they will have to deal with one of singular courage and resource. It is a callous argument, but that much we must ignore. My own idea is to lead them to the belief that we are watching them. Let us play the part of a thrasher to the whale—hang on to them, day and night, track them to their port, and cable news to Europe when we can. If they run for South America, we shall fall in with ships bound to Rio and Monte Video. The mails to the Argentine have the Marconi instrument. We can hardly fail to catch one of them. I would sooner burn this yacht than turn back now. If you, my friends, are of another opinion, do not be afraid to tell me so. We have

lost one poor fellow and may lose others. It is for the men, and for them firstly, to say how far we shall go and what risks we shall take.”

(*Larry.*)—“The men are of one mind, sir. Don’t think more about them. Poor Holland’s death has settled it. They would go through fire to be up with yonder ruffians. Of course, I see how you are fixed. We could sink their hulk with a torpedo and make no bones about it. But that’s not to be thought of. Just stand by and tease them, say I, and as near out of gunshot as may be.”

(*McShanus.*)—“The docther says the lady must put up with their insults, but ye can see the blood going and coming from his cheeks while he says it. I honour him for it. We want to get the girl off the ship, and not to lose the Jew in the doing of it. ’Tis an employment for a Japanese wizard, faith. Here’s yon rogue running for a South American port, and when he’s ashore, he’ll make monkey faces at ye. Tell yourselves that, and cry out against the Governments. It’s all ye can do that I can see.”

(*Myself.*)—“I am far from sure of it, Timothy, but prophecy is of little help to us. We must follow these people and let them know that we are following them. Impudence has stopped one of their fleet and may stop another. I am going to see how far it helps me with the Jew himself.”

More I said to the same end, but there would be no purpose in repeating it. Let it be sufficient that we decided ultimately upon a plan of pursuit which would keep these people aware of our presence by night and day, and provoke them to every attack which it lay in their power to make upon us. The rest was beyond us. We could but face the issue calmly, accepting that which was decreed both for ourselves and for her whose safety we so ardently desired.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

SEVEN DAYS LATER.

*The Rogues Fall Out.*

There is much of which my log might speak to tell the history of the seven days which followed upon our resolution. We had pledged ourselves to harass the Diamond Ship by night and day, and bravely had we done so. Incessantly now the messages passed from our deck to hers by way of her flags and instruments. Threats, defiance, insult—to these we became accustomed. A torture of suspense had been superseded by a dull submission to necessity. Joan Fordibras was a prisoner, and we could not lift a hand to save her. I did not trust myself to think what she had suffered or what those hours of alternating hope and suspense must have meant to her. No light came to me of the sunniest day. I could but wait and watch.

All this time we lay drifting some two or three miles, I suppose, from the great vessel which harboured the Jew and his company. Sometimes, when the night was moonless, we ran up boldly and spied the huge ship out, defying her untrained gunners and learning what we would of that which passed upon her decks. There was a cabin aft, I remember, which I named as Joan's; and I would place her therein and depict her in my mind sheltered there from the Jew's anger and the insults of his fellows. How changed she must be from the Joan I had seen upon the beach at Dieppe, the laughing little Thalia of the sandy shore—the Joan who had plied me with such earnest questions, looked up at me with eyes so full of doubt and the desire to believe! Nor could I hope to be in any sense the figure of her childish romance. She might not even know that *White Wings* followed her at all—possibly they kept her too close a prisoner to learn anything, which the guns did not tell her, of our pursuit and its consequences. Such must be my supposition as I watched the yellow light glowing in her cabin windows and said that Joan was awake and weary for my coming.

That which perplexed us chiefly was the evident indecision of those who commanded the great ship. At first we thought that they were steering her for a South American port; but after running for twenty-four hours almost due westward, they lay to once more and drifted, without apparent aim, whithersoever the tide of the South Atlantic would take them. What their purpose was I could but hazard by conjecture. Possibly they waited for another patrol from Europe—it may even be that refugees were upon the high seas, and that Imroth did not dare to desert them. I could but guess his reasons, I say, and guess-work helped me but little. The nameless ship guarded her secrets too close that I should hope to be the master of them.

Now, thus six days had passed, and I will take you to the morning of the seventh, when chancing to be on the poop at a very early hour, Balaam, our Scotch bo'sun, called my attention to the distant ship, and to something which was passing on her decks.

"There's nae a pill for the parritch the morn," said he in his dry fashion; "yon body's fired no gun, sir, since yesterday noon. May be 'tis pure joy of heart. I'm not knowing rightly, but it's sufficiently remarkable as you must be thinking."

This was new, surely, and I gratified the good fellow by admitting as much.

"It looks as though she was running a bit short of ammunition, Balaam," I said. "Has there been anything else you have noticed?"

"Naething in particular, sir. She's fired a pop-gun or two, but, may be, she's over merry the morn. You can hear them for yourself. Bide here a moment, and I'll show you."

He took his stand by the taffrail and pointed with a tarry hand at the distant ship. Day had broken propitiously with a fleece of cloud high in the heavens, and a simmer of splendid sunlight upon the chattering waters. The Diamond Ship, herself, lay distant perhaps a couple of miles from us. She had sails set to prevent her rolling, but not a vestige of smoke escaped her funnels, nor was there any indication of her being under steam. When I spied out her decks through my powerful glass, I perceived that they were crowded with men.

"Why," I said, "they are fighting among themselves."

"Ay, such kittle-cattle would likely take to that employment."

"And the guns which they fired—why, it's providential, man. Go and call Captain Larry at once."

I am not habitually to be moved to any great display of mental exhilaration; but I confess that this amazing scene robbed me altogether of my self-possession. The surprise of it, the unlooked-for development, the vast possibilities of a mutiny amongst the Jew's men had, it is true, suggested themselves to me in one or other of those dreams of achievement with which we all combat the duller facts of life; but that such a hope should be on the verge of realisation, that I should, with my own eyes, witness the beginning of the fulfilment of it, and hear the guns which justified my dreaming—that, I say, appeared to me the most wonderful thing that had happened since our voyage began.

"Larry," I said, when he came up from the cabin—McShanus upon his heels, "they are shooting each other, Larry. I hope that the news distresses you——."

He did not reply immediately, but focussing his glass, he directed it upon the distant ship. Timothy, in his turn, took his stand beside me, and clapping his hand upon my shoulder, answered for the Captain.

"I wish 'em honourable wakes. Did ye think of this dochter?"

"Not as a probability."

"And what would happen to Joan Fordibras if they quarrelled amongst themselves?"

"I dare not think of it, Timothy—she would be in her cabin. Why do you make

me think of it? Are not the circumstances eloquent enough?"

He cringed away from me—excellent fellow that he was, and I knew that he blamed his own indiscretion—and spoke no further word for many minutes. All hands on the yacht had now come up to see a spectacle at once so terrible and unlooked for. Upon my part, I stood by the taffrail to watch the puffs of heavy white smoke and try to depict the tragedy then consummated on the decks of the Diamond Ship. What a scene of horror and bloodshed it must be! I could readily imagine that there had been two parties, and that they had come first to words and then to the arbitrament of deeds. Some of the Jew's men, I said, had been for running to a South American port, others had been for standing by such of their comrades as Sycamore's relief might bring. They fell to hot talk upon it, I might suppose, and then to blows. And now we could hear the crack of their rifles and could see the smoke of them soaring upwards amid the taut white sails even to the truck of the mainmast. What sights and sounds that curtain of the vapour must hide from us! And who shall wonder if the situation provoked us to a rashness without precedent. We had temptation enough, surely.

"Larry," I said, "I am going to see what is happening yonder. Let Mr. Benson know that we shall want all the steam he can give us. There is no risk to anyone. Please let the men understand as much."

"You are going up to the ship, sir?"

"Within a biscuit toss, and nearer perhaps——"

"It's staking much, sir."

"So little, Larry, that we'll have our breakfasts while we watch them. Even Mr. McShanus, you observe, is not disturbed. I believe that he imagines himself in a theatre——"

But Timothy McShanus answered this for himself.

"Indade and I do," said he, "and no more disturbed than a man at a hanging. Set a dish of parritch before me and ye shall see. Faith, should I weep tears because one thief is cutting another thief's throat? Divil a tear at all."

We laughed at this splendid earnestness, while Larry went up to the bridge, and Timothy himself came up to me and spoke a more serious word.

"Ye are easier in your mind," he said, scanning my face closely. "'Tis good to see it, Ean, me bhoy. Ye don't think Miss Joan will suffer—now, do ye?"

"She will suffer, but only in her fears, Timothy. The danger comes later, when this is over. I do not think of it because I hope to share it with her."

"Good God, ye are not going on board, man?"

"I am going on board, Timothy—that is, if my judgment leads me to believe it possible. I'll tell you in half-an-hour's time."

He was too amazed to reply to me, and for many minutes he stood there, plucking at his iron-grey whiskers and whistling softly. The yacht stood by this time within half-a-mile of the great ship, and every furlong she made set the fascinating picture before us in clearer focus. That our approach would be observed or any notice taken of us, I never for one moment believed. Whatever cause of quarrel set

those wolves at each other's throats, they fought, it was plain, with the desperation of maniacs.

Taking my stand upon our forward bridge I could clearly discern a group of men defending the fo'castle, and another in ambush behind the superstructure amidships. A powerful glass disclosed the prone figures of such as had already fallen; while the intervals, when a restless breeze carried the haze of smoke to the eastward, permitted a fuller view of the spectacle revolting in its detail.

The villains were evidently enraged beyond all measure. I could see them in the death-grip, here wrestling as athletes upon a stage; there fighting upon their hands and knees, as savages who cut and slash at the face and head and heart in insurpassable lust of blood and life. But beyond this, the greater terror was to know that the ship sheltered Joan Fordibras, and that she must be the witness to this debauch. What could it mean to such a one to suffer that? Again I say that I had no courage to think of it. Our own situation forbade such thoughts. We were running right up as though to ram the leviathan before us, and the very voices of the combatants could now be distinguished by us; while the sunlight showed us the shimmer of the knives, the reeling figures, and the death agonies of our enemies. Had we been of the mind, we could have sent them to the bottom with a torpedo from our tube, and no man among us been a penny the worse for our temerity. But to such a vengeance as that we had no call; nor did we so much as contemplate it while Joan remained their hostage. It was sufficient to watch them as we would; to wait and hope for the first fruits of a tragedy so providential.

We had come to no agreement upon the nature of our approach or upon the limits which prudence should set to it. I left it to Larry's wise head, and I could have done no better. A splendid seaman, he proved himself that day to be also a master of tactics which kept our yacht astern of the big ship, and crept up to her upon such an angle that risk of detection—at least until the fight should be over—need hardly be considered. Not until we were within a cable's length of their poop did he bring *White Wings* to—and there we lay, rolling to a gentle swell, half the hands on deck, some on the riggings, the officers with Timothy and myself on the bridge; as amazed a company as sailed the Atlantic that day.

I have told you that the contending parties upon the deck of the rogue had taken their stands respectively at the fo'castle, and by the superstructure amidships. This seemed to point to the conclusion that the seamen of the ship had mutinied upon their officers; and Larry I found to be of my opinion.

"The hands have turned it up, and the dead-weight is going under," said he, with an indifference to the suffering we witnessed that I had hardly looked for—"I shouldn't wonder if you are responsible, sir. A thieves' crew is for fair weather. Let a cloud come up as big as a man's hand and they'll run for port though Davy Jones takes the tiller. They've had enough of it—any man could see that with half an eye. And heaven help the Jew if he hauls his flag down."

"You mean, Larry, that we have got on their nerves, and they can't stand us any more. I shouldn't wonder. They think we have support behind, and are waiting for a



Government ship. That must be it—but if so, what do they want Imroth to do? Is it to run to port? They would hardly expect to land without trouble.”

“Men like that never know what they want, doctor. Did you ever see a Malay run amok? Well, I’ve been round the corner of a plantation hut when a yellow devil was taken with the idea that the exercise was good for him, and mighty quick I skipped, to be sure. That man wanted nothing in particular. It was an Eastern way of tearing up newspapers and smashing the crockery. Those fellows yonder don’t know what’s the matter with them, and they are going to cut up the Jew to see. I wish ’em luck, but I’d sooner be aboard here than eating macaroons on their deck, and that’s the truth of it. Ask Mr. McShanus what he thinks. Perhaps he’d like to put off in a small boat——?”

I looked at Timothy, and saw that he was as white as the planks on which he stood. Viewed from afar, the spectacle had been one of fire and smoke and imagined fury. But proximity made of it a picture of savage bloodshed, revolting in its fury and gruesome in its detail.

One incident stands out in my mind, horrible beyond others, yet an example of many the day was to show me. I recollect that just as we brought the yacht to, a man tried to creep out of the big cabin amidships, which plainly sheltered many of the Jew’s party on the Diamond Ship. The seamen by the fo’castle spied him immediately, and one of them fired a pistol at him—it was evident that the bullet struck him in the shoulder, for he clapped his hand there quickly, and then trying to run to his comrades, he fell heavily upon deck. Now began a scene such as I hope never again to witness. The wounded man lay upon the deck, hidden from our sight, of course, but plainly the object of a violent combat.

On the one side were his friends making frantic efforts to drag him to safety; on the other, the frenzied seamen shooting blindly at the place where they believed him to lie, and so at once preventing his escape and the approach of his companions. Baffled in their desire to kill him out of hand—for the corner of the cabin amidships prevented that—they, nevertheless, so frightened him that he lay cowed like a wounded bird, and thus afraid to rise to his feet or to make any effort to save himself, one of the hands from the fo’castle crept round the superstructure presently and deliberately cast a grappling anchor over the poor fellow’s body.

In an instant now the sailors had their victim. How the anchor had caught him, whether by the flesh or by his clothes, my position upon the bridge forbade me to see; but I could clearly perceive the hands pulling upon the rope and hear the ferocious exultation which such success provoked. Yard by yard they dragged the man to his doom. A quick imagination could depict him clinging madly to the combing of the forward hatch, clutching at the capstan and the windlass, contesting every inch of that terrible journey at whose end a score of unclasped knives awaited him. For myself, I turned my eyes away when the moment came and shut my ears to the dying man’s cry as it rang out, in fearful dread of death, over the hushed waters. They had killed him now, and while their shouts of triumph still echoed in the still air, they flung the body overboard, and it sank immediately from our sight. Such

was their vengeance, such the punishment for what wrong, inflicted or imaginary, we knew not, nor cared to ask.

A great silence fell during the after moments of this tragedy—as though awe of it had compelled a mutual truce between the combatants. I do not know precisely at what moment Larry gave the order, but certain it is that the yacht began to steam slowly away from the ship when the dead man's body fell into the sea; and having made a wide detour, we raced at some speed presently almost due south, as though pursuit of us had already begun. This was a course I could not protest against. Let the rogues agree, and our position were precarious indeed. Larry had perceived as much, and wisely stood away from them.

“They'll be kissing each other if they spy us out,” said he. “I don't believe they've any shell for the big guns, doctor, but they could do a power of mischief with the monkeys on the tops. We are as well off in the gallery as the stalls, especially in between times. Let us stand by where we shan't amuse them so much.”

The wisdom of it forbade reply. We had pushed rashness to the last extremity, and had come to no hurt. The truce over yonder was unmistakable. When a steward reminded me that none of us had taken any breakfast. I heard him patiently.

“Bring it to the deck,” I rejoined.

And so four silent men—for Mr. Benson had joined us—sat about the table beneath the aft awning, and each, fearing to express the great hope which animated him, sipped his coffee methodically, and spoke of commonplace things.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### DR. FABOS BOARDS THE DIAMOND SHIP.

#### *And Learns the Truth There.*

Our surmise that the rogues would agree presently among themselves and fall upon us for their common satisfaction was not supported by the facts. We breakfasted at our leisure and smoked a full pipe upon it, still unmolested and apparently unobserved. It may be that they had become accustomed to our presence. For seven days and nights now we had harassed them unceasingly. By messages, by gunshots, by our searchlight, had we pursued that policy of persistence which, we believed, would most surely demoralise and defeat them. And they had been powerless to harm us; helpless before our attack, as I judged from the first that they would be.

They fired no shot at us, and the morning passed in patient waiting. Great as our hopes were—my own too great for any expression—the Diamond Ship had no further message for us, nor did the sea speak. Void from horizon to horizon, the southern ocean fretted to sleep beneath a torrid sun and left us with that sense of isolation from the world and from men which the great sea alone can inspire. Some among us, it may be, had fallen almost to despair when the rogues set to again. This would have been at three bells of the afternoon watch. A gunshot heard faintly across the waters appeared to be the signal for some new attack. I heard the rattling echoes of a volley, and upon that a second and a third. Our glasses showed us a great press of men, engaged almost hand to hand amidships. Then a haze of smoke settled down upon the ship, and for many minutes it hid her completely from our sight.

You may imagine with what beating hearts and almost breathless hopes we watched this second encounter and waited for its issue. Very wisely, Larry would not approach the scene a second time or risk again those perils we had so readily faced before. Whatever harvest we might reap, our garners would be as readily filled afar as by any mad concession to curiosity which should drive us within the danger zone. If the rogues were killing each other, as evidently they were, it could serve us not at all to witness the horrors of that tragedy or seek in some vague way to take part in it. As for its deeper meaning, I had from the first clenched my thoughts against that and refused to take cognisance of it. The knowledge that Joan Fordibras was the prisoner of such a crew, that other decent women might be aboard the Diamond Ship with her—that, I say, had I permitted it once to master me, would have brought me to such a state of frenzy that no sane act afterwards could have atoned for its follies. Earnestly, persistently, I strove to drive the truth away, and to

blind my eyes to it. "She is not on the ship," I would say—or again, "They will not harm her, for she alone stands between them and the gallows." God knows how much of a pretence it was—and yet, I think, the very effect of will brought salvation to us. A mad attack upon them would have undone all. I realise to-day the good providence which saved me from that.

Now, we had been waiting all this time for the smoke to lift from the hull of the Leviathan, and permit us to see, as far as it might be seen at such a distance, that which happened upon those woeful decks. As for the curtain of the vapour, it was but a spur to the imagination, a terrible cloud interposed between our burning eyes and those scenes of horror and of bloodshed it hid from us. Rifle shots we heard incessantly—now in volleys, again by twos and threes, then once more in a general exchange which seemed to speak of the crisis of battle. Nor might we argue a good omen of the stillness which fell afterwards. For, surely, it could be nothing else than the silence of victory, the final triumph of one faction above the others. This I pointed out to Larry as we lifted our glasses for the twentieth time unavailingly.

"I take it that the men are up against the rogues, Larry. We could wish for nothing better than news of their success."

"You think so, sir?"

"I trust a seaman before a landshark any day, whatever his ship or nationality. He is more likely to honour a woman, Larry—there will be some measure of honesty in him; and if it is put to the vote, he will haul down that flag the first time he is asked. Why should he not? He has nothing to fear ashore. The rogues keep him afloat. I'd wager a hundred guineas that homesickness began this fight, and will carry it to a conclusion—that is if the seamen win——"

"And if they do not, sir?"

"Then God help the ship, Larry—she will not be afloat a week."

McShanus interposed to say that they were between the devil and the deep sea, surely. I found him wonderfully serious. It is odd to think how many cheery fellows, who write gaily of life and death in the newspaper, have never seen a gun fired in earnest or looked unflinchingly upon the face of death.

"'Tis a coward I was," said he, "and not ashamed of it. This very minute I tremble like a woman—though 'tis often of kindness a woman trembles and not of fear. Look yonder at the smoke lifting from off the face of the ship. What lies under it, my friends?—God Almighty, what are those feeling and thinking and suffering now that they are going to their Maker. 'Tis as though I, myself, had been called this instant to remember that I shall be as they—who knows when, who knows how? A cruel torment of a thought—God help me for it."

Here was a McShanus mood to be laughed off, and that it would have been but for the panorama suddenly disclosed by the soaring smoke which gradually lifted from the face of the hidden ship. Nor was it clear in a twinkling that the seamen (as I supposed would be the case) had obtained the upper hand, and were become the masters of the vessel.

We could see them by our glasses running hither and thither, from the fo'castle

to the poop, in and out of the companion hatch; now up, now down, sometimes in single combat with one or other of the vanquished; again slashing in a glut of mad desire at a prostrate figure or an enemy already dead. What weapons they had, I found it quite impossible to say. From time to time, it is true, a pistol was discharged as though it were at some lurking or hidden foe; but in the main, I believe they must just have used common marline-spikes or had gone to it with their clasp-knives in their hands. And their anger, however it had been provoked, defied all words to measure. As beasts to the carcase, so they returned again and again to the bodies of those whom they had destroyed. We espied victors in all the attitudes of bravado and defiance, dancing, leaping, even striking at each other. And this endured so great a while that I began to say the holocaust would go on to the end and hardly a man of them live to tell the tale.

This fearful encounter ceased finally about four o'clock of the afternoon watch. Ironically enough, I heard them strike eight bells just as though it had been upon a ship in good order at sea; and as the sounds came floating over the water to us, I reflected upon the amazing force of habit which governs a sailor even in the most terrible of situations.

"Larry," I said. "They would change the watch even if the sea dried up. What's to be done now? what, in God's name, can we do? I'd go aboard if it were not criminal to take the risk. That's not to be thought of—a man would be safer in a lion's den at present. And yet think of what it must be over there——"

"I've been trying not to think of it all along, sir. Whatever's happened, it's over now. They're putting the dead overboard—and, what's more, launching a boat. I shouldn't wonder if they came alongside, sir."

"Alongside us, Larry? That would be something new. Do you really mean it?"

"You must judge for yourself, sir——"

We put up our glasses, Timothy declaring, as usual, that there was a plaster across the end of his (for he never learned to use the telescope), and followed with new interest the movements of the victorious seamen. Certainly, they were putting the dead overboard, and, as Larry had perceived, they had lowered a boat. Possessed, I suppose, of what they thought to be a fine idea (for seamen are gregarious beyond all others), they presently lowered a second boat, and upon this a third. Someone firing a gun to call our attention, they next flagged a message to us, so plainly honest that I caused it to be answered without a moment's loss of time.

"We want help. Stand by to pick up a boat."

To this our reply fluttered out, that we would permit their boat to come alongside; and the more to encourage them, we steamed toward the great ship and met them when they were little more than the half of a mile distant from it. There were seven in all, I made out, and a little lad at the tiller, the boat itself being an ordinary lifeboat, painted white, but ill kept and shabby. As to the nationality of its crew, I could detect a huge nigger at the bow oar, and another man of colour amidships, while the rest were mostly dark skinned, and one I took to be an Egyptian. Whoever they were they came towards us with great spirit, as though

pleased to be free of the shambles they had quitted and very anxious to deliver some message. In this we encouraged them, lowering a gangway and bidding them send a spokesman aboard—which they did immediately without any parley or suspicion, so that I no longer doubted their honesty or even considered the possibility of a trap.

“Let Bill Evans go up,” was their cry; and, sure enough, up came a ferret-faced, red-whiskered, simple-looking fellow, who answered to this very English designation. Standing in an odd attitude before us, shuffling his feet nervously, and fingering a broad-brimmed felt hat, William Evans certainly expressed himself with difficulty.

“Mates,” he said, “I’d be very obliged to know if you carry a doctor on this ship?”

Larry looked at me, but I made no response. We must hear much, I reflected, before we answered such a question as that.

“Is that your message, sir?” Larry asked a little severely.

Again the man thumbed his hat and continued parrot-like:—

“I’d be obliged to know if you carry a doctor on this ship. That’s first. We’re in a clove-hitch and no mistake. Some’s gone and that’s an end of them. The rest would be thankful for a doctor, and there’s no denying it. Mates, if you’re Christian men, you’ll come aboard and help poor seamen——”

His candour was really remarkable. I thought it quite time to take up his cross-examination myself.

“Come,” I said, “we must know more about it than that. What ship is yonder and who is in command of her? Answer my questions properly, and it is possible that we may help you. There has been a mutiny, and you have the upper hand. Why should we take any part in it?”

He looked up at me, a foxy look, I thought, and stumbled through as strange a narrative as I have ever heard.

“Old Salt-Horse went off in the relief,” he began, and I knew he meant Imroth thereby. “Captain Ross has been first since. He was for lying in this——hair-oil of a sea; we was for going ashore. That’s what the lady wanted, and d——n me, who was to stand agen it? Eight months have me and my mates been floating about this ocean like a flock of——ducks. Did I ship with Salt-Horse for that? As true as God’s in heaven, I come from London Road, Plymouth, and Bill Evans is my name, same as my father and mother before me. You come aboard and do what you can for us, and we sail the ship to Rio. No harm comes to the young lady, but she stops aboard until we’re ashore, and that’s my last word if I swing for it.”

The man had become bolder as he went on, and now he threw his hat defiantly upon deck and looked at us all as though he had been an ambassador carrying a message to a king. Perchance he but little understood the significance of his words or the surpassing interest with which I heard them. Val Imroth escaped? All well with my little Joan—how could it be otherwise since they asked us aboard! Here were two facts which changed in an instant the whole complexion of our schemes and shattered them to the very base. I no longer thought of plan or prudence or any

human consideration at all, but that of carrying Joan Fordibras the tidings of her safety, so far as that safety lay within our power to ensure. I must board the Diamond Ship. At any cost, I must speak with Joan.

“Larry,” I cried, shouting it out so that those in the boat below could hear every word of it—“Larry, I am going to help these men. Stand by for my signal. If there is any treachery, you will know what to do. Show this fellow what we carry—let there be no mistake about it. They sink or swim—no half measure, Larry! So help me Heaven, I will send them to the bottom in less than five minutes if they so much as think a word against me.”

Larry’s answer was to command our own crew to lower the launch and to stand by the guns. Delaying only to call Okyada to my side, I followed the strange ambassador down the gangway stairs and began my voyage to the great unknown.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### THE STRONG ROOM OF THE OCEAN.

*Dr. Fabos Fails to Find Joan Fordibras.*

The boat's crew laid to their oars with a hearty will, directly I gave them the word; and we shot over the still waters almost with the speed of a steamer's launch. It was a new experience for me to find myself afloat upon the Atlantic in a small boat, and I confess, even in such fair weather, not wholly a pleasant one. The long rollers, alternately lifting us to prodigious heights and plunging us as to a very abyss of the ocean, shut in turn both ships from my view and permitted me but a rare glimpse of them as we rose upon the crest of some rolling wave which seemed about to engulf us utterly. I realised, as all seamen realise from time to time, the meaning of man's victory over the sea and the splendour of it. And excitement carried me without distress where I would have feared to go upon a common day.

I was about to see my little Joan again. Unless this man had lied to me, so much must be beyond question. I should find her on the great ship and take her, at last and finally, from this hive of ruffians into which the accidents of life had cast her from her very childhood. Much as she had suffered, it remained my hope that her own courage and the circumstances of her presence upon the ship had saved her from that nameless evil which might otherwise have been her fate. Imroth had kept the child from harm—that I firmly believed; and Imroth having fled, the terror of his name might still be powerful to save her. Herein lay the supreme consolation as our voyage drew to its end, and every rolling crest showed us more clearly the immense hull, standing up from the water like a very Castle Impregnable. I was the bearer of a message to Joan Fordibras, and she should be the first there to whom the story of succour must be told. There could be no purpose dearer to me or one I embarked upon so gladly.

The sun had been upon the point of setting when I quitted the yacht, and a chill of evening fell with an aftermath of drifting mist as the men drove the long-boat up to the ship. My first impression, for I had never before viewed a big steamer from a small boat on the open sea, was one of a vast towering immensity rising sheer above me as the wall of a fortress or the black precipice of a mountain. The ladder itself, by which I must gain the deck, swung fragile as a thread from a boom amidships—no steam came from the ship's valves, although the bilge was flowing freely. I could detect no sound of movement or human activity; nothing but the appearance of three or four pale anxious faces at the gangway above allowed me to say that the ship had a crew at all. These men, however, waited for my coming with an expectancy which was almost pathetic, and scarcely had I climbed the ladder than they surrounded me



immediately with such piteous entreaty to come to their comrades' aid that my own imperious question sounded abrupt almost to the point of harshness.

"You have a lady upon this ship—where is she?"

"She has gone, sir."

"Gone! good God, how can she be gone?"

"We knew what you would ask, and sent down to her cabin a quarter of an hour ago, sir. She was not there. Mr. Colin Ross, him that commands for Mr. Imroth, he says he knows nothing of it. It's true as heaven, sir—the lady's come to no harm by us, nor would have done if she had been aboard here twenty years. There wasn't a man that wouldn't have given his life for her. We don't know where she is, sir, and that's gospel truth."

Imagine the scene. I stood upon the open deck of the strangest steamer I have yet set foot upon—a steamer so splendidly fitted and furnished, as one glance told me, that no Atlantic liner, whatever company floated her, could have claimed a greater elegance. The bridge above me had the neatness, the shining brass, the white ladders of a man-of-warship. The guns were polished to the last possibility. Every cabin into which I looked appeared to boast the luxury and equipment of a state saloon on a Cunard or a White Star boat. I perceived an immense dining hall aft, and a companion-way not unsuited to a ten thousand ton steamer. There were boats abundantly, safety rafts—the usual equipment of an ocean-going vessel, and yet, in the strongest contrast, something which differentiated this ship from any other I had ever visited, and placed her at once in a category apart. This was nothing more nor less than a screen of solid steel bars, ten feet high, perhaps, and defended by forbidding spikes, sharp as swords and impossible to fend, a screen cutting the vessel into two clear divisions, and obviously the Jew's protection against all others who sailed with him. I judged at once that the men lived forward of this screen; Imroth and his chosen company aft. A wicket gate, just large enough to admit the body of a man, permitted communication between the divisions; but the steelwork itself appeared to be carried cunningly over the bulwarks in a manner that must have rendered absolutely the aft cabins secure not only against the seamen collectively, but against any spy among them who had the fancy to watch the Jew in his less suspicious moments.

This wicket-gate, be it said, stood open when I climbed to the main deck, and the men now passed to and fro at their will. The most horrible aspect of the picture did not immediately present itself to my notice. I was some minutes aboard before my eyes discerned the huddled figures of men, some propped in bent attitudes against the bulwarks, some already dead, a few crying horribly in the agony of mutilation. As the scene unfolded itself, the woe of it became more terrible to witness. There were sailors of many nationalities here, chiefly, I perceived, from South European and Mediterranean ports, Turks in their native dress, sturdy Greeks, Tunisians, seamen from Algiers and the Adriatic. Of those who crowded about me unwounded, two were Americans, one a nigger, a third a little Frenchman, who gabbled to the point of delirium. The appeal, however, was common to all.

“Help our friends, doctor—save them for God’s sake. We have no doctor on board. Herr Klein sailed with Mr. Imroth. We can do nothing for ourselves.”

The woe of it appalled me. I knew neither what to answer them nor how best to help them. Many a day had passed since I practised my own profession. And to be called upon as a surgeon upon a battlefield!

“Have you stores?” I asked. “Is there a surgery on board?”

They shouted an affirmative all together. Half-a-dozen among them were ready to lead me below. Hesitating an instant to give my command to Okyada, I went with them as they desired.

“Miss Joan is on the ship,” I said to the faithful fellow. “Find her and take her to the yacht.”

Okyada looked up at me with one swift, almost wistful glance, and disappeared immediately from my sight. The burly American, who posed as my guide, pushing his comrades aside, led me through the wicket gate, and we descended the great companion-way. It would be impossible adequately to describe the luxury and the splendour of this part of the ship even as one brief scrutiny revealed it. The very lamps appeared to be of solid silver. The panelling was of the rarest woods, teak and old Spanish mahogany and satin wood. I caught a glimpse of the great dining saloon, and beheld walls covered by pictures of undoubted mark and quality—chiefly of the French and Spanish schools. We passed by a boudoir furnished with such elegance that Paris alone could have commanded its ensemble. There was a card room not unlike that of a great London club, with little tables and electric lamps upon them, and even discarded packs scattered in angry disorder upon the blue Persian carpet which covered a parquet floor. Crossing this room and leaving it by a door toward the centre of the ship, I found myself immediately in a broad corridor lighted from above, and the walls of this appeared to be of steel. Had I been in doubt as to the meaning of it, the American’s candour would have settled the matter without question.

“Old Five’s strong box,” said he. “That’s where he keeps what isn’t good to eat. I guess the best of the stuff’s landed by this time. It went off in Colin Ross’s ship. You might buy yourself a gold brick out of what’s left and not be much poorer. We share and share in that now. There used to be a guard down here night and day when old Isaac was aboard. I guess you scared him pretty badly. He ran for the Brazils the day after we sighted you——”

I asked him but one question in turn.

“Was General Fordibras on board with the man you speak of?”

“Not this trip. I heard tell he’d gone to Europe. He’s too easy for this job. Three-Fingers never could look a Sheffield knife in the face. I guess his daughter’s got all the courage.”

We had passed another door of steel as he spoke and descended a short flight of stairs to a second corridor, about which were cabins of a commoner order. Here the surgery of the ship had been located—a well fitted, thoroughly modern apartment, recently tenanted, it seemed, by a doctor who knew what the hospitals of Europe

were doing. A quick search discovered the antiseptics, the wool, the liniment and the lancets, without which so little could be done for the wounded men above. There was nothing missing for the practice of a modern art.

It would be a work of supererogation to tell you of the long hours which followed immediately upon my assumption of the *rôle* of ship's doctor. I passed through them as one passes through a dreamland of restless thoughts. There were no fewer than thirty-one wounded men upon the steamer; and, of these, seven belonged to the fo'castle party, twenty-four to the saloons. The latter chained my interests in spite of their condition, for there were Englishmen among them, and faces that the stories of recent crimes had made familiar to me. One lad, slashed heavily across the forehead by a clasp knife, had been mentioned, I remembered, in connection with the famous forgeries upon the Bank of England some five years ago. I recognised the Italian jewel thief, Detucchi, the German forger, Urich, the young Belgian, Monterey, supposed to be serving a sentence of penal servitude for life for his attack upon King Leopold. Happily, few of these men had been wounded by rifle bullets. Those whom the guns had killed fell upon the instant and their bodies were already in the sea. My patients were the victims of cuts, fearful gashes in some cases, and difficult fractures in others. Two died while I tried to help them. It was a woeful task, and I trust that I may never be called to its fellow.

The honest men, happily, for so I called the sailors of the ship, had suffered considerably less. I found them profoundly grateful for such services as I could render them; nor did the American hesitate to tell me frankly the story of the mutiny.

"We were making for Rio, but Mr. Ross stood out," he said. "A relief's expected, and I guess there are some law-sick folk on board her. He treated us like dirt, and began to talk of rafting. Do you know what rafting is, doctor—no, well, it's putting living men overboard on a raft as big as a deal board and wishing 'em good luck while they go. Don't try it while you can sail saloon. Colin Ross fell sick of a fever and is down below raving now. We got the arms by tickling the mate's whiskers and promising him Ross's berth. That was the first and the last of it. We shot 'em down like sheep, and now we're going ashore to spend our money—those that live, though they're like to be few enough."

Here was a truth beyond all question. I stood on the deck of a veritable plague ship. A wail of death rose unceasingly. Night had come down, and a thick white mist enveloped the ocean all about us. The yacht was nowhere to be seen. Of all the hours of that great endeavour, this, to me, was the most terrible, alike in its menace and its suggestion.

For I said that the yacht might lose me in the fog and leave me, the prisoner of these desperate men, and their hostage against the justice which awaited them.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### THE BRIDGE AND AFTERWARDS.

*Dr. Fabos Visits Colin Ross.*

I was in a situation of grave peril; but it would have been imprudent beyond measure to have admitted it. Possibly the accident of their advantage did not occur to the men, nor had they discovered it. There was no order on the ship, no commander, no person in authority above others. The agony of wounds forbade any consideration of that which should be done or of the methods of doing it. I perceived that the men regarded me in some sense as their good angel, paying me the compliment of trusting me, and obeying my commands as faithfully as if I had been their captain. They could even remember that I had gone fasting, and speak of food and drink.

“Old Valentine knew a good tap when he tasted it, and there’s plenty of the right sort on board,” the American said to me good-naturedly. “You only give a name to it and the corks will be flying like rockets. Ask for what you’re wanting, doctor, and I’ll skin the lubber who doesn’t run to fetch it. The Lord knows what my mates would have done if you hadn’t come among them.”

It was honestly said, and as honestly meant. And yet, willingly as I would have accepted his cordial offer, fear of the consequences held me back. Who would dare to think of drink amid such a crew as this, or to remind men that drink was to be had? I could depict a Saturnalia defying the powers of a Poe to describe, such an orgy as a sane man might dream of in a horrid sleep, should these ruffians broach the casks or be reminded of the spirits which the ship carried.

My immediate anxiety was to divert their thoughts from my own situation, and to lead them to regard me rather as one of themselves than as a stranger. As for the mystery of my little Joan’s disappearance from the ship, the excuses which had been made to me, and the obvious sincerity of them, I knew no more than the dead what these might mean. While at one time I would doubt if she had ever been on the ship at all—plainly as I had thought to see her there—there were other moods in which I could almost believe that these ruffians had killed her, and that she also must be numbered among the victims of the night. This, however, would mark a moment of despair, to be forgotten readily when action called me to some new task. These men had sworn that Joan lived. Why should I question a sincerity which all my observation declared to be genuine?

So thus the matter stood when darkness came down and the fog lay thick about the Diamond Ship. Okyada, my servant, had vanished unaccountably, nor had I heard a single word concerning him since we came on board together. The yacht

had disappeared from my ken, and the shrewdest eyes could not detect her situation, or the quickest ears give news of her. In these trying circumstances I welcomed a request from one of the seamen that I would visit Colin Ross, the captain of the vessel, and until lately the representative of Valentine Imroth, aboard her. This man I found lying grievously wounded by a bullet which had entered the left lung and penetrated in such an ugly fashion that his life must be a question of hours. His was not an unpleasant face, nor was his manner in any way repellent. I told him frankly, when he asked me, that he could not live, and he answered with a wan smile that was almost a sob.

“Good God! sir,” he said, “how little any man, who makes a beginning on a crooked road, ever sees the end of it! I was the captain of a Shields collier two years ago, doing well, and calling my home my own. When Mr. Imroth found me out, I would no more have done a shabby thing than have harmed my little baby girl, who’s waiting for me in Newcastle now. Money bought me—I’ll not deny it. I promised to run this ship to the Brazils for a thousand guineas, and there’s Imroth’s seal upon it on the table yonder. You may not believe me, but what the story of this business is, how these men came here, or why they have come, I know no better than the Pope of Rome—and that’s the truth, if my life’s the price of it. And yet, sir, that it’s a bad business I’d be a fool to deny. He who touches pitch gets plenty on his fingers. I knew that Val Imroth was a bad lot the first day I saw him—and bad enough are his companions on this ship. Why, good God! there’d have been murder done every day if it hadn’t been for fear of the man and his words. He puts a palsy on you when you hear his step—his breath’s a flame of hell—this crowd shivered at his look. It’s fear of him that’s kept them quiet since he ran for shore; it’s fear of him which will send them all to the dock in the end; as sure as I lie here telling you so.”

I cannot conceal the fact that this interview affected me greatly. Here was a robust British sailor, a man perhaps of thirty-five years of age, brown-haired, blue-eyed, and of an open cast of countenance, about to give up his life and to pass for ever from the love which awaited him in England because a monster had breathed a breath upon him, and had cried in his ears the fables of the gold. Hundreds of men, as innocent as this man, were exiles from wife and children to-day, outcasts, jail-birds, suspects, human derelicts, because of this devilish net which had enmeshed them, of these criminal arms which had embraced them, and this voice of lust which charmed them. Many a man have I seen die—but not as this seaman died, with a child’s name upon his lips, and a child’s image before his eyes. Of what avail to speak at such a moment of the Eternal Hope in the justice of an Almighty and all-Merciful God, or to recite those platitudes in which pious folk take refuge? Colin Ross was thinking of the child who nevermore would call him father, or by him to be called child again.

This, however, is to anticipate the hour. There was much upon which I would gladly have questioned the man; but little that he had the strength to answer me. Just as the seamen had sworn that it was all well with Joan, so did he bear them out with

such emphasis as his failing strength could command.

“We were to make the Brazils and take a passage for Miss Joan to London. Her father, General Fordibras, is there, doctor. If harm has come to her, it is since I left the deck. The men worshipped her—there are rogues enough, I grant you, who would have had their say, but I shot the first dead with my own hand, and the men answered for the second, God help him! You’ll find Miss Joan all right, and take her back to her father. For the rest, I can’t advise you, sir. You are safe enough on board here while this trouble is new—but when it’s past, save yourself, for God’s sake; for your life will not be worth a minute’s purchase. Remember what’s at stake if this ship makes port and you are there to give an account of her. Hands and passengers alike will prevent that. No, doctor, get aboard your yacht while you can, and leave these men to their destiny.”

He spoke with much dignity, though it is hardly necessary for me to say that I had travelled already upon such lines of thought as he laid down. When I left him, it was with a promise to see his wife and child in Newcastle, and to give them what comfort I could—but chiefly to keep the story of the darker hour away from them; for, as he said, “they hold my name dear.” He had but a few moments to live then, and that merciful euthanasia which is frequently the hand-maiden of death, as long experience has shown to me, rapidly came upon him and left him but the passing dreams of a sleep which all must know, and from which all must awake.

Now this befell, I suppose, about eleven o’clock that night. There was still much mist when I came upon deck, but it had lifted to the northward, and the atmosphere was everywhere clearing. I had some expectation of spying out the yacht should the breeze strengthen, and yet there was no hour of all that emprise which found me in such a desolation of spirit or so doubtful of the ultimate issue. Why had my friends made no effort to reach me? What kept them? Why did they leave me here at the mercy of these cut-throats, my life as a gossamer which any puff of anger might destroy, my liberty in these ruffians’ keeping? Sober reason would have replied that they could have done nothing else; but this was not the time for reason, and, indeed, I came to call it the darkest hour of them all. Vainly I raged against my own acts and the judgment which had carried me on board the ship. It had been madness to come; it would be madness to let the men know as much. Already I was aware of a disposition to treat me with less respect—it may have been pure imagination, but the idea came into my head, and a brief conversation with the American did nothing to displace it.

“I am going aboard my own yacht,” I said to him—that would have been about the hour of midnight. “I am going aboard my yacht, but I will return at daybreak and see what more I can do. Mr. Ross says that you are heading for the Brazils. That is no affair of mine. The man I want is no longer on the ship. I have no concern with the others nor they with me. Let us put things as straight as we can—and then talk about the shore.”

This should not have been said. It occurred to me almost as I uttered the words that the man had not hitherto thought about the yacht at all; but no sooner had I

spoken than he stepped to the gangway and immediately realised the situation.

“Guess your people have gone hay-making, doctor,” he said far from pleasantly. “Well, I don’t suppose it matters much anyway. My mates want you pretty badly, and while they want you, I guess you’ll have to stop. Just step down and take another look at Harry Johnson, will you? He’s raving like a fool-woman in the Doldrums. You can turn in by-and-by—I’ll see what Williams can do for you—though it’s forward you must swing your hammock, and no two opinions about that.”

To this I answered, in a tone as decisive as his own, that my comings and my goings would be ordered by none but myself, and that his friend must await his turn. A long acquaintance with rogues has convinced me that any weakness of civility is lost upon them, and that firmness to the point of brutality is the only weapon. I would have shot this man dead had he given me an impudent answer, and his surprise when he heard me speak was something to see.

“No offence, doctor,” he said presently. “I’ll tell Harry you’ll be along presently. Don’t think as we’re not obliged to you for what you’ve done. The boys are ready enough to tell you so. You take your own time, and do what’s best pleasing to you. There’s work enough, God Almighty knows.”

He spat his filthy tobacco juice into the sea, and turning upon his heels went forward to join his companions by the fo’castle. A scene so weird is not within my memory. Depict the grey mists drifting upon the water, the silvery waves in those lakes of radiance the moonbeams could create, the stillness of the ship, the prone forms of men whose sobs and groans marked the intervals of sounds, the lanterns set about the decks, the great mast looming above, the spars and yards, and the monster bulk of the funnel. And this ship, remember, was a house of sanctuary to all the friends of crime who should bow the knee to Valentine Imroth, and come to him with plunder in their hands!

What stories could not its cabins tell! What crimes had been committed—murder and lust and shedding of blood—what awful cries had gone up from its decks, the cries of strong men at the gate of death, of women in their agony! All these phantoms came to me as I paced the quarter-deck and asked, almost as a man in despair, what kept my friends or how long the mists would prevail? I could imagine a day when this mighty idea had first occurred to the Jew’s cunning intellect, and he had acclaimed the possibilities of it. What police, and of what nations, would seek their criminals upon the high seas, or search there for the jewels which the chief rogues of Europe brought to a sanctuary so sure? What mind would have read this riddle aright unless accident had suggested its answer? I claimed nothing for myself; a thousand times an irony would it have been to do so.

Let me escape these decks, and how much further was I upon the road to finality? I could tell a plain tale to the Government, certainly, and could open the doors of this temple of assassins to the world—but who would crush so vast a conspiracy? What unity of international action, what initiative would war upon the greater evils of it, hunting the tigers from their dens or ridding the cities of their

allies? All that I had done, all my planning, all my thinking, had left the Jew a free man and sent me a prisoner on the deck of his ship. And God alone could give me freedom, that God in whose immediate Providence I have never ceased to believe!

This was the outcome of my philosophy as I stood by the gangway and watched the shifting mists; here opening a little silvered pathway—as to an arbour of delights; there beating down again in dank clouds of vapour and shutting all the hither scenes from my view. The men had left me alone for the time being, but their absence seemed a greater peril. I could hear a loud argument going on by the fo’castle, and voices raised in persuasion or in anger. The monster ship herself drifted helplessly, as a great stricken beast lurching in agony and seeking only a place to end its woes. Every faculty that I possess told me that I was in great danger. These rogues would come forward presently and put some proposition to me. So I argued, nor did the night give me the lie. Shuffling and hesitating they came, some twenty or more of them, before another hour had passed, all together in a deputation, and as ready, I would swear, to cut me down where I stood as to drink the rum which an obliging purser had served out to them.

The American, I perceived, was to be their chief speaker, and with him was the man called Bill Evans. Advancing by the promenade deck in a body, they seemed to find some little difficulty when it came to expressing themselves in plain English; and had the situation been less dangerous, it would have been ridiculous enough.

“Well, my men,” I cried, being careful to have the first word at them; “what is it, now? Speak up, I shall not eat you.”

“Beg pardon, sir, we wish you to know that Will Rayner has been made captain of this ship, and that he wishes you to go below.”

The man named Evans spoke, and I must say his manner was diverting enough.

“That is very considerate of Mr. William Rayner,” said I, with a laugh. “Will he not step forward—am I not to have the pleasure of seeing him?”

“He’s back there by the capstan, sir. We’re a depytashun, if you please. Will won’t have nobody aft the galley, and that’s his plain words. You’re to go below and to wait until you’re sent for.”

I looked the speaker full in the face and laughed at him contemptuously.

“My men,” I said, calmly addressing them all together, “do you wish to be afloat to-morrow morning, or is this ship and all aboard her to be at the bottom of the Atlantic?”

They were evidently perplexed. The gentleman by the name of Bill Evans continued to speak.

“Me and my mates, beggin’ your pardon, sir—we don’t fall in with that. You’re fair marooned, and that’s the end of it. Will says as he means well by you, but while you’re on this ship, you’ll obey him and nobody else. Humbly representin’ it, sir, we’ll have to see that you do as Will says——”

I took a pistol from my pocket, and deliberately cocked it. This was touch and go for my very life. Had I shot one of those men, I knew that it would all be over in an instant, and that they would either bow the knee to me or murder me on the spot.



“Now, see here,” said I. “My yacht’s lying out yonder not a biscuit toss from this deck. If you give me so much as another word of impudence, I’ll send you and every ruffian aboard here to blazes as sure as this is a revolver, and there are cartridges in it. Go and tell Mr. Will Rayner what I say, for, by heaven above me, I will go myself and fetch him, if you do not.”

I have said that the moment was critical beyond any through which I have lived, and a truer word could not be spoken. There we stood, the angry seamen upon one side, myself upon the other, each party knowing that the issue was for good and all, and yet neither willing to bring the instant of it upon us. As for these wretched fellows, I do not believe that they would have lifted a hand against me had it not been for the American who incited them. He was the ringleader despite the newly-made captain, and his mock authority. And he was the dangerous man with whom I had to deal.

“I guess your yacht may be where you say she is,” he remarked with a drawl; “but she’s got to hustle if she wants to come up with us this summer weather. Don’t you be too free with that pistol, sir, or some of us will have to take it from you. You’re in a clove-hitch, and had better keep a civil tongue in your head or maybe we’ll cut it out and see what it’s made of. Now just you come along o’ me and don’t make no trouble about it. Will Rayner ain’t a goin’ to eat you, and you ain’t a goin’ to eat him, so step up brisk, doctor, and let’s see you march.”

This impudent harangue was hailed by a salvo of applause. The fellow himself took two steps toward me and laid a hand upon my shoulder. He had scarce touched me with his fingers when I struck him full in the face, and he rolled headlong into the scuppers. The same instant saw me leaping for my very life up the ladder to the bridge deck and clutching there at the rope which opened the steamer’s siren. Good God! What an instant of suspense! Were the fires below damped down, or was there steam in the boiler? One tremendous pull upon the rope had no answer for me at all. Again and again I jerked the cord back as though very desperation would sound the alarm which should summon my friends and, at the same time, save me from this rabble. The men below watched me aghast, their curiosity overpowering them, their mouths agape, so that when the siren’s blast went echoing over the still sea at last, you could have heard a footfall on the decks, or caught the meaning of a whispered message.

The men were dumbfounded, I say, and without idea. This I have ever observed to be a habit among seamen when the news of any great disaster comes upon them or they are taken unawares in an instant of emergency. No clown could look more childish then, or any Master Boldface laugh as foolishly. There they were in a group below me, some with their hands thrust deep into their pockets, some smoking idly, some looking into the faces of their neighbours as though a glance would answer the riddle of the night. And while they stood, the siren roared a blast of defiance, again and again, as the voice of a Minotaur of the deep, warning and terrifying, and not to be resisted. Had I doubted the vigilance of my good comrades upon the yacht, I could have doubted it no longer. *White Wings* answered my signal almost instantly

in a higher note of defiance, in a shrill assent to that wild roll-call, the orator mechanical of honest friendship. And, while she answered, her siren seemed to put a reproach upon me, saying, "The yacht is here—all is well—why have you doubted us?"

A deep silence fell upon the Diamond Ship when this signal came reverberating over the waters. None of the amazed seamen spoke a word or made a movement for many minutes. I had already put my pistol into my pocket and taken a cigarette from my case. If I wished the men to believe that the hour of crisis had passed, I was under no delusion at all myself. For remember that I had gone up to the bridge and stood there during this supreme instant of danger; and that, if I would regain the deck of the yacht, I must descend the ladder, down through these serried ranks of men; must pass them as one who was going from them to the house of an avenger, to his comrades who would judge the story and help him to decide upon the punishment. The rogues' very salvation depended upon my captivity; I was their hostage, and by me would reprieve come if reprieve were to be hoped for at all. This I perceived long before it had dawned upon the witless rabble; but it occurred even to them at last, and crowding about the ladder's foot they told me bluntly that they were aware of it.

"Guess it's your turn," said the American, venturing a step upward but no more. His manner had become sheepish, I observed, and he spoke with less truculence.

"My turn, as you say, sir," I rejoined with what composure I could. "I am now going aboard my yacht, and there I will decide what is to be done with you. That will depend upon your behaviour, I advise you to remember as much."

I lit my cigarette and waited for him to go on. *White Wings* was evidently quite near to us now—I could hear the throb of her turbines; her siren hooted repeatedly. The night was mine but for an accident. And yet, heaven knows, it appeared to me then that an accident must befall me unless a miracle intervened.

"That's your yacht right enough," the Yankee went on immediately. "And so far as it's her, we're in a clove-hitch ourselves. The question is, who's to put you aboard her, and what shall we be about when he's doing of it? Now, see here, as between man and man—you give us your solemn affidavit not to do anything against this ship's crew and you're free to come and go as you choose. That's my first condition—the second is as you sign the paper Will Rayner has drawn up and abide by its terms. Do as much as that and your friends shan't be more willing to help you. But if you don't do it—why, then, look out for yourself, for, by the Lord above me, you ain't got ten minutes to live."

He came another step up the ladder, cheered, as it seemed, by his own eloquence. As for the men, they opened their lips for the first time since my yacht had answered me, and their hoarse roar of defiance, uttered in that unpleasant timbre to which the sea attunes the human voice, backed the threat and made it their own. Had it been left to me in circumstances less dangerous, I might have given them my word to let me go free, and signed the paper their leader spoke about; but just in the same measure that they threatened me, so did my anger against them rise—and

stepping briskly to the topmost rung of the ladder, I answered them in a sentence that even their dull intellects could understand.

“Not a word or a line, by God! That is my answer, sir. You may take it or leave it; but if you leave it, some of you shall as certainly hang for this night’s work as this is a pistol I hold in my hand. Now stand back, for I am coming down amongst you. Yonder, you see, is the boat I am expecting.”

Lifting my hand, I pointed with dramatic intent to the port quarter of the ship. The sea was void upon that quarter—what need to tell it? But my eyes had already detected the black outline of a ship’s boat upon the starboard bow, and my very life depended upon the ruse which should divert the men’s attention from it. Never shall I doubt the ruffians would have made an end of it there and then, and have murdered me as they had murdered the criminals upon the ship, if the argument had been carried but another sentence. I had seen knives unsheathed at my words, had heard the promptings of rogue to rogue, that low muttering of the human beast who has scented prey, and whose nostrils are distended by the lust of it. Let the talk run on, and they would be up the ladder and upon me, cost what it might—up and on me, and their knives at my throat. This I understood when I pointed to the port quarter and sent them gaping there in a body—as children who are not content to hear, but with their own eyes would see.

My freedom, nay, my life depended upon the ruse. Such a fact was clear above all others. It had been no lie when I said that my friends were coming to me. Athwart the great ship, not fifty yards from the starboard bow, lay the long boat which had been sent out to me. I took one last look at the huddled forms below me, debated the possibilities in one of those swift mental surveys to which long habit has trained me, and staking all upon the venture, risking every peril both of the men and the sea, I leaped boldly from the bridge and left the issue to the God of my destinies.

So the tragic hour began for me, and such were its circumstances! The rushing waters booming as a dirge in my ears, my clothes dragging me down as a burden insupportable; darkness and the dread sea all about me; a black sky meeting my vision as I rose gasping to the surface—no knowledge now of where the boat lay or in what direction to strike out; no certainty that my friends had seen me or were alive to my situation—nothing but silence and the long rollers carrying me, and far away a distant shouting, an echo of pistol shots, a rejoinder of strong voices and then a silence, so deep, so profound that the very wavelets were as cataracts beating at my brain. This, surely, was the moment when a man might have told himself that he was cast out utterly from man and the world, a true derelict of the vast ocean, a voice crying in a monstrous silence, a sacrifice to wind and wave and the gaping sea. The deepest dungeon ashore could not have inflicted a wound of desolation so terrible.

I was there within a cable’s length of those who would have given their very lives for me, and yet as far away from them as though I had stood at the foot of Mount Terror and cried to the skies for my salvation. Not a sound, not a whisper of life did the wind bear to me. A strong swimmer, I lay deep in the water, the spindrift

cold upon my face, the ripples of the crests soaking my hair, the blue-black sky for my zenith. And how far had those minutes carried me from humanity and all human interests!

Calmly, as a man in a reverie of the mind could, I recounted this adventure from the beginning, and wondered why I had set out upon it at all. What was it to me that these rogues pitted their wits against their brother rogues ashore? Who had made me the judge of crime and its servants, or permitted me to say that one man was a thief and another man honest? The great ocean laughed at such laws and their makers. Might and majesty and the throne of winds—were not they a kingdom stupendous in its grandeur and unsurpassable in its magnitude? No sense of danger, indeed, went with me to the waters. I heard their dulcet voice and answered them—I saw the figures I had known and loved, and no sense of regret attended the vision. An unquenchable fire of confidence burned in my brain. I believed that I should see little Joan again, though the waters engulfed me utterly.

Let me claim no merit for a mental attitude so unusual. I have known many men who have been taken from the water almost upon the point of death, and in no case does fear seem to have been a part of their experience. Certainly, in one or two instances, they have spoken of great pain in the lungs, but their chief recollection has been a supreme content and of a profound sense of rest as though the peace and loneliness of the deep had communicated itself to their souls and robbed them in an instant of that burden of life of which all, with whatever courage they may bear it, are sensible. Speaking again for myself, I do not think it is a misrepresentation to say that I had no overmastering desire to be saved from the peril which had overtaken me. Not a morbid man, or one who is insensible to the privileges and duties of our common destiny, I will confess that a certain ironical view of human things came to me as the good tide carried me, and the surf bathed my face. All the littleness of the everyday existence, its petty bickerings, its trumpety ambitions, were so much sport for the rolling waves about me, so much silvery laughter for the surging swell and the cradle of the billows. And if this mood changed at all—as I know that ultimately it did change—the new spirit breathed human love as its chief desire, the simplest of the human affections, the depth, the truth and the nobility of them.

I saw then that there is nothing permanent in life but love, nothing to be so surely desired, no human quality so precious as that habit of loving. And passing from the more general admission, my own story must present itself to me again, and bid me ask why I had left Joan Fordibras at all when I found her at Dieppe; why I had accepted the challenge there thrown down to me when I might have taken her in my arms and written the golden page in our lives once and for ever? This reflection could move me instantly to a great pathos of regret, and inspire in me a mad striving after some shore of my safety when I could say, "I have not done well; the blame is mine." And from this time I thought but of Joan alone; saw her face looking down to me from the skies above, and heard but the plaintive music of her voice. No words may tell the sudden distress of this—there is no measure of human speech

which shall convey to another the depth of that human anguish of loss a man may suffer on the threshold of death. It is the supremest trial of all, a very agony of the soul defying all expression.

I have been at some pains to set down these impressions closely, for they stood to me for the bitter reckoning I must pay for the quest of Valentine Imroth and the ship he had commanded. Cast out there upon the black ocean, I had been a fool to believe that I merited any particular mercy of the Almighty which would repair my mistakes or pass by my imprudence. That I had escaped into the sea at all now seemed the greater wonder. I could depict the instant of fierce exclamation which had followed upon my plunge, the roar of voices, the loud report of vain pistols. These I had heard with my own ears, and it should have come to me that my own fellows had heard them also. Little good reasoning, however, may be looked for from a man cast down from a high deck into the Atlantic Ocean, and there left to battle with the surges in the shadows of the night. How long it was before the end came I shall never know. I recollect that I had the sense not to swim but merely to keep afloat as near as might be to the scene of my rashness. The intervening moments, as I say, brought me from a state of content to one of despair, and from that again almost to a state of insensibility—and I know only that a great rough hand took me from the sea at last, that white faces bent over me, and that, kindest of them all, was the face of Joan Fordibras—my little Joan of the Valley House—who stooped and kissed my lips, and with a young girl's tears expressed the welcome by her heart unspoken.

And so love was the Avenger after all—love set above the kingdoms of Death as love shall ever be.

## CHAPTER XXX.

JOAN TELLS HER STORY.

*And we are Homeward Bound.*

Mr. Bob Sawyer, I believe, expressed his opinion upon a famous occasion that there was no medicine in all the world half so efficacious or so infallible as rum punch—to which axiom he added the rider that if any man had ever failed to derive benefits from this nectar, it was because he had not taken enough of it. Such a doctrine, for my part, I find incontrovertible. There is no cure for an overdose of cold water so swift and certain as the remedy the excellent Robert has prescribed. There is assuredly none so rarely declined or so readily sampled by the patient.

I am an exceedingly strong man—and, despite the assertions of my dear sister Harriet, my constitution is of iron. No common exercise tires me; I can walk all day and be the better for my walk at bed-time. I have swum five miles in the sea on two occasions, and defied all the faculty after a wetting more times than I care to remember. If it be foolish to boast overmuch of such a catalogue of physical merits, I set them down here that I may speak of the hours following upon my rescue with that brevity they deserve, and spare the reader any pedantic account of them.

It had been Okyada's hand which dragged me from the sea, and Larry himself who steered the boat which discovered me. Despite the fog, that lynx-eyed captain of mine had dogged every movement of the Diamond Ship, had stood so close to her throughout the adventure that he could sometimes have tossed a biscuit to her decks. When the rabble chased me to the bridge, his keen ear had detected the commotion. He heard me leap for my life, and guessed instantly the nature of the situation which drove me to this extremity. His express commands had kept the long boat in the sea from the beginning, and in the sea she swam when I had most need of her. They told me afterwards that a crew had manned her and was away before you could have counted twenty. It must have been so, as the outcome shows.

Now, these good fellows, dragging their prize by the head and the heels as seamen will in bursts of nautical ecstasy, bundled me into the boat and the blankets almost by one and the same movement; and rowing swiftly to the yacht, they fought their way through the little knot of anxious men, and had me rubbed down like a dog and safely in my own bed almost before I realised that they were my friends at all, or that their vigilance had saved me from the sea. For my own part, I suffered them as one suffers a man who insists upon an exhibition of his goodwill and is not to be repulsed. I had no pain, be it said, no sense of weakness, no symptom either of exhaustion or of extreme cold. Whatever emotion agitated me was chiefly the emotion of friendship, and of the sure knowledge that Joan Fordibras was on the

ship, that she moved and breathed near by me, and, with God's help, would remain my prisoner to the end of my days. For, be assured that, despite old Timothy, who roared for the hot water and the lemons in a voice that could have been heard in the truck, little Joan had taken as proud command of that cabin five minutes after I entered it as any commander of a ship who hoists his pennant at Portsmouth. Nor had anyone the right to drive her thence or to take that place she occupied so gracefully.

How gentle is a woman's hand in the hour of our misfortunes; how unmatched her sympathy and unwearying her patience! These old truths we know as copybook maxims, and yet there are few who understand them truly until illness is their master and captivity their lot. I was not ill—bed was no proper place for me—and yet I lay there watching Joan, afraid almost to speak, wistful of her care, gratitude as surely in my heart as though this had been a house of sickness, and she had been its ministering angel! How silently, how deftly, she moved! There was grace in every movement I thought, grace and sweetness and light. And she was my Joan of Dieppe again. The shadow of the Valley House no longer dwelt upon her childish face.

I suppose it would have been early in the new day when Joan took charge of me, and old Timothy brewed the punch and Larry came and went from the cabin to the bridge as a man full of anxieties, and yet in some sense content that it should be so. These foolish nurses of mine had so far told me nothing, nor did they hear me talking with equanimity. An immersion in the sea is often regarded by a sailor, of all men, as a dreadful tragedy. Few of this trade can swim, nor does a sailor ever look upon the water as other than an enemy. So now Larry would have kept me to my bed, smothered in blankets, and dosed like an old salt with Timothy's rum. It is little wonder that I became almost angry at their solicitude.

"Why do you do all this, Joan?" I asked her, when half an hour of it had passed. "Am I a child to be petted and spoiled because its pinafore is wet? Tell Captain Larry that I am coming up to the bridge. You cannot suppose that I shall be content to lie here now. Tell him I am coming up at once. It is nonsense to make such a fuss."

Joan shook her head as though, thus early, she had come to despair of me.

"Only a man would talk like that," she exclaimed, and then—"only a man would be so ungrateful."

"I demur to the charge. You set a great crowd of bullies on me to hold me down by violence, and then talk of ingratitude! Do you not see, my dear girl, that I must know what is going on? How can I lie here when there is so much uncertainty—when so many things may happen? Please do as I tell you, and let Captain Larry know at once."

She came and stood by my bedside, and touching my fingers for an instant with her own—a gesture which thrilled me as though some strange current of a new life burned in my veins—she said very quietly:—

"There is nothing happening, Dr. Ean. If you went up to the bridge, you would

see nothing but the fog. That is what Mr. McShanus is looking at now—at the fog and the punch bowl. We cannot see the others—we shall never see them again, I hope.”

It was calmly said, and yet what a tale of woe it voiced: days of her own agony among the ruffians, intolerable hours of suffering and distress! I thought her then one of the bravest of women—I think so to this hour.

“Joan,” I said, “how did you come here? Where did Okyada find you? I have thought much about it, and I believe that I know. But you must tell me yourself. You hid in one of the boats, did you not—one of the three boats the men lowered when they wished me to go on board this yacht. I thought it must be so. There was no other way.”

She had seated herself by this time in a girlish attitude at the foot of my bunk, her feet swinging together as though to express a sense of her indifference; her hands clasped, her eyes avoiding mine as though she feared I would read the whole truth therein.

“You were a wizard always, Dr. Ean. My father, that is General Fordibras, said so—Mr. McShanus thinks it, and so does Captain Larry. Yes, it was in the last of the boats that I hid myself. I saw them lower it, and then when they all got into the first two I climbed down from the gangway and hid myself under the tarpaulin. Have you ever been really afraid, Dr. Ean—afraid for an instant of something which seems to be worse than your thoughts can imagine? Well, I have been afraid like that ever since Mr. Imroth took me on the ship—afraid in a way I cannot tell you—yes, so afraid that I would lie for hours, and shut all sights and sounds from my ears, and pray that the day would find me dead. I tell you now that you may not speak to me of it again—I could not bear it—God knows I could not.”

For an instant, and an instant only, her courage failed her, and, burying her face in her hands, she wept like a child. Herein I think she gave expression to that pent-up anguish she had so long supported silently and alone. I did not seek to comfort her, did not answer a word to her piteous entreaty. The circumstances of her rescue must, in the end, be their own answer to her fears, I thought.

“We will not speak of it, Joan,” I said gently. “It was a clever thought to hide yourself in the boat, and I wonder it occurred to you. Of course I should have been disappointed if I had been wrong. Directly they told me that you were not on the ship, I guessed that you had jumped down into one of the neglected boats, and that Okyada would find you there. That is a fellow who reads my mind more clearly than I can read it myself. He is the true wizard. We must keep Okyada always with us when we go back to the old home in England, Joan. I would not lose him for all the riches on your Diamond Ship and more. Yes, indeed, we must never part with Okyada.”

This was said with some meaning, and Joan Fordibras would have been unworthy of the cleverness with which I credited her had the intent of it failed. She understood me instantly—I knew that it would be so.

“I must go to Paris,” she rejoined with a dignity inseparable from such an



answer. "General Fordibras will be waiting for me there. I must go to him, Dr. Ean. It was never his intention to send me on the ship—no, I will do him the justice to say that. They tricked me into going—Mr. Imroth and those with him. My father would have taken me back to America. He promised me that the day I went to Valley House. I believe that he was in earnest—he has never told me a lie."

"A point in his favour and one of the best. Then it was the Jew who took you away that night my friends saved me! I should have thought of that. I should have guessed as much."

Insensibly, you will see, I had been leading her to tell me the whole story of her life since we had been separated at Valley House. Her determination to go to Paris I found worthy of her attitude since the beginning; her loyalty to this arch-villain, Fordibras, remained amazing in its consistency. After all, I remembered, this man had shown her some kindness, and, in a sense, had acted a father's part toward her. I did not believe that he had intended deliberately to brand her with the crimes his agents had committed. That had been the Jew's work—the work of a man who was the very keystone of this stupendous conspiracy. I could not blame Joan because she had the wit to see it.

"You will remember that it was after dinner, Dr. Ean, and I had gone up to my room," she said, replying to my question. "I had been there perhaps half an hour when the old servant, who used to wait on me, came up and said that my father was waiting for me in the gardens. I ran down at once, and followed her to the mountain gate, which the General alone made use of. There I met the negro, who said that I must accompany him to the observatory which is on the cliffs, as you know. I did not suspect anything; why should I? My father was often at the observatory with Mr. Imroth, and I imagined that they had some good news for me. That was a child's thought, but I am not ashamed of it. No sooner had we passed the tunnel than two of the sailors ran up from the cliff road and told us that the General had gone on board the yacht, and that I must follow him. It was a trick, of course. The yacht was waiting for me, but the General was not on board her. I was helpless in their hands, and we sailed that night to join the *Ellida*——"

"The *Ellida*! So that is the name of their ship. The Hebrew is a bit of a sage, it appears. Was not the *Ellida* the ship of Frithjof in the fable, and did not it understand every word he spoke? A clever hit. They would name him for a Norwegian and neglect to be suspicious. I see the point of it, and admit his sagacity. He took you with him, not meaning any harm to you, but principally to frighten me. Well, Joan, I should not have been frightened, but it would be untrue to tell you that I have so much sense. There are hours when most men lose their courage. I lost mine entirely upon the night when they signalled a message concerning you. If I had been somebody else, I should have seen at once that it was mere sound and fury, signifying nothing. You, I suppose, were comfortably in your cabin sleeping meanwhile. That is generally the story—one of two in a frenzy of anxiety, and the other quietly sleeping. Let us say no more about it. The circumstances will never recur, I trust, if we live for a thousand years—an unnecessary piece of emphasis,

young as my Joan is.”

I had brought a smile to her face now, and she began to tell me many things about the Jew’s ship which, otherwise, I am convinced, would never have been told at all. There were thirty-two so-called passengers on board, she said, eleven of them women—and a crew, as she heard, of fifty hands. The smallness of this did not surprise me. Here was a ship which rarely went into port, a great hulk floating in the waste of the Atlantic—what need had she of men? The fellows idled about the deck all day, as Joan confessed, and at night there were scenes passing all words to describe.

“We lived as you live in the great hotels in London. Ships came to us frequently from England and America, and supplied us with all that was necessary. Mr. Imroth rarely saw anyone, but the others played cards all day, and when they did not play cards they quarrelled. Then at night all the cabins would be lighted up, and there would be dancing and singing and dreadful scenes until daybreak. While Mr. Imroth was on the ship I saw very little of it all. He made me keep my cabin, and he was right to do so. When he left us, it was very different. I remember that a young Russian fell in love with me the first day I went on deck—there were others of whom I cannot speak, and moments I shall never forget. Mr. Ross was very kind, but he had not Mr. Imroth’s influence with the men. When he came on board, Mr. Imroth sailed for the Brazils, and the mutiny began. Some of the men wished to go ashore; there were others who would have waited for their companions who were coming out from Europe on a relief ship. Then one night the alarm was given that your yacht had arrived and was watching us. Mr. Imroth had told the men all about you, and when you were sighted, I believe they thought that there were other ships with you, and that their end had come. From that night it was one long scene of terror and bloodshed. I lived—I cannot tell you of it, Dr. Ean; you would never believe what I have seen and heard.”

I told her that I could well understand what had happened. When rogues fall out and there are women among them, then, assuredly, do men lose the image of their humanity, and take upon them that of devils. The scenes upon the ship must have defied all measured description. I could imagine the shrieks of women, the oaths and fury of the beaten criminals, the terror of the seamen, the long nights of drunkenness and debauch, the fury of combat—above all the rage and madness against the man who had contrived all this. What would my life have been worth amongst these men if I had gone aboard them before the battle had been lost or won, or the hour of their extremity had arrived. That little Joan herself had escaped the more awful penalty remained a wonder of the night. I could but be sensible of a gratitude to the providence of Almighty God which had saved her—from what a fate!

“I must teach you to forget it, Joan,” I said; “the homelands of England will help you to blot out these memories. It is too early yet to say exactly what course we must take; we have so much to learn and the time is short. But we are homeward bound now, and never again will there be a home for me where little Joan is not.

That is what I have to say to you to-night. There will be sunshine to-morrow, Joan, and we will see the new day together. The world could give me no greater happiness.”

She did not answer me. I knew that she was thinking of the sorrow of her own life, and telling herself that she could never be my wife until the mystery of her birth and infancy were mine to judge. And this was the malice of it—that the men who could solve that mystery were criminals both, fleeing from justice, and as likely to seek a meeting with me as to vaunt before the world the story of their crimes.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### THE END OF THE DIAMOND SHIP.

*Dr. Fabos turns his Eyes toward England.*

I suppose that I slept a few hours at the dead of night; but certainly I was awake again shortly after the sun had risen, and upon the bridge with Larry, as curious a man as any in the southern hemisphere that morning. Remember in what a situation I had left the Diamond Ship, the problems that remained unsolved upon her decks, the distress of her crew, the trials and judgments that awaited them ashore, the sure death prepared for them upon the high seas. All this the fog had veiled from our reckoning last night; but the day dawned clear and sunny; the curtain had been lifted; the whole picture stood there asking our pity, and in some measure our gratitude. Had we any longer a duty toward the honest men yonder—if honest men there could by any possibility be; or did other claims call us imperiously back to England and our homes, to tell the story where all the world might hear it? These were the questions which Larry and I discussed together, as we stood on the bridge that sunny morning and focussed our glasses upon the distant ship. Should we abandon her or return? Frankly, I knew not where our duty lay. The problem presented possibilities so awful that I shrank from them.

“There are women aboard there, Larry,” I would say.

And he would answer as often:—

“There are men aboard here, sir, with wives and little children waiting for them at home.”

“We could stand by them, Larry,” I put it to him. “If they come to reason, we should do all that is humanly possible for their wounded, and those who are deserving our pity.”

“You cannot stand by them, sir—you have not a pound of coal to waste. Mr. Benson says he will have all his work cut out to get us to the Azores as it is. We shall look pretty if we imitate them and drift about here till Doomsday. And we haven’t any music on board, sir. We must go dancing to our own complaints. Have you thought of that, doctor?”

“God knows,” said I mournfully. “There they are, sickness and fever and death on board—women at the mercy of ruffians, the ship drifting helplessly, the dock waiting for them in any honest port, little chance of making any port at all. What is a seaman to do—where does his simple duty lie? Answer those questions, and I will begin to agree with you. We are men and must play a man’s part. Tell me, I repeat, where our duty lies and we will do it.”

I will do Larry the justice to say that when he had made up his mind upon a

given course, he rarely turned from it. His own crew were justly dearer to him than any ship-load of criminals drifting in an unmanageable hulk upon the Atlantic Ocean. And the logic of his case was, I suppose, unanswerable.

“Doctor,” he said, “if your brother lay dying, would you call first upon him or the son of your neighbour who had hurt himself running away from the police? You ask me where our duty lies, and I’ll tell you in a word. It lies to Miss Joan first of all—to see that the shadow of this trouble never falls upon her childish face again. And after that, it is a duty to the brave men who have served you so well, to them and their homes and those who are dear to them. Yonder ship is as well off as we are, and in many ways better. She is now in the track of mail steamers bound to the Argentine, and will quickly fall in with help. If you board her again, they will cut your throat for a certainty, and try to board us when that is done. Leave them to the justice of Almighty God. Their destiny is in other hands. That is wisdom and duty together.”

I knew that he was right, and yet I will confess that I surrendered to his judgment with reluctance. There is an unwritten law of the sea that no sailor in distress shall be deserted, however just or merited his fate may be. We could take the honest fellows from the ship, I would persist, and do all humanly possible for those who were sick. It would be a reproach to me afterwards, I feared, a memory of a day neither altogether glorious nor altogether merciful. As to the great hulk herself, my glass showed her decks clearly, but did not discover any signs of life upon them. Just as I had left her drifting at the mercy of wind and current, so now did she lie sagging in the troughs of the rollers, a piteous spectacle of impotency and despair. The very sails upon her masts were torn and ragged as though long neglected by a seaman’s hand. No smoke issued from her funnel; the boats had been taken up; I could espy no commander upon her bridge nor discern that brisk grouping of the hands upon the fo’castle which bespeaks a voyage. She might have been a phantom ship, a sea vision conjured up by dreamers—and such I could almost believe her.

“At least, Larry,” said I, “we will take another look at her if you please. Miss Joan is sleeping, I imagine. She will know nothing of this, and the men are not to suppose that I am unmindful of what I owe to them. Let us learn, if we can, what is happening over yonder—then we shall turn homewards with lighter hearts. Even our miserly Benson will not tell me that we have not coal enough for such a diversion.”

He had no reasonable objection to offer to this—and, to be plain, our very course must carry us in some such direction. We had stood by the ship all night, and she lay now upon our port-bow, distant, perhaps, two miles from us on a spirited sea which tumbled before a fresh westerly wind that would be half a gale presently. As we drew nearer, the pictures, which a good telescope had revealed to me, were not belied. I could now make out a few hands at the fo’castle hatch; there was a solitary figure by the taffrail, and two or three more about the main deck. Nowhere, however, did any evidences of activity appear. Had I not seen the afflicted with my own eyes, dressed their wounds and heard their woful complaints, it would have

been impossible to credit the burden of human anguish which that vast derelict must carry. That such a ship could now do us any mischief seemed beyond all belief incredible. None the less, the fact must be recorded that we were still some half a mile from her when she fired a gun at us, and a shell fell idly into the sea not a hundred yards from our foremast. Nor was this all, for a second report immediately rang out from her decks, and a great flame of fire leapt up above them, though no shell followed after, nor could the quickest eye detect the path of any shot.

“Larry,” I said, “that is what I have been expecting all along. The breach of one of their guns is blown out. I wonder how many lives it has cost?”

“But you are not going on board to see, sir?”

“Indeed, no. Their shot has answered all my questions. It is homeward bound now, Larry—full speed ahead as soon as you will—and God help any innocent man if there be such over yonder.”

His rejoinder was the bell ringing out loudly in our engine-room below. To the quartermaster he cried in a captain’s sharp voice: “One point starboard,” and was answered, “One point starboard it is.” I perceived that we had altered our course almost imperceptibly, and were now steering almost direct to the north-east, which must bring us to the islands of the Azores, and the coal we needed so sorely. If there were any regrets, one man alone suffered them and remained silent. It had been so much my own emprise from the beginning; I had hoped so much, dared so much, feared so much, because of it, that this silent flight from the scene, this abandonment of the quest, this abject submission to our necessity could be accounted no less than a personal humiliation which must remain with me whatever the subsequent achievement.

I had set out to drag the Jew to justice. A voice ironical reminded me that Valentine Imroth was free and ashore, that he mocked my knowledge, and might yet outwit a sullen police. The great house of crime he had erected must be pulled down for a season; but who would say that it would not be rebuilt upon a foundation of human credulity more sure, and to be relied upon, than any he had yet discovered? I had not brought this arch-villain to justice; I knew nothing of the confederates he had upon the high seas, of the ships which befriended him, it may be of other refuges as safe and unnamed as this vast hulk now sinking below the horizon and disappearing from my view. And what was this but failure, failure as complete as any in the history of the police I had derided—a failure which no circumstances could atone, no explanations justify? Such were my reflections—such the thoughts that came to me as the great ship faded from my vision, downward to the nether world where the voices of the lost should welcome her, and the spirits of the damned give her greeting.

Long I stood there, my eyes upon the horizon, my vision enchained by the void as though a voice must come to me from the unknown and say “This is the truth; this is the hour.” We were alone on the waste of waters now: a brave ship running homeward to the cities and the cottages of England; a ship that carried stout hearts and merry men; upon whose decks the prattle of little children might in fancy be

heard, their childish forms uplifted, their young lips kissed. From all this joy I stood apart. What had home to give, what were the shores of England to me if I might not find there the love and confidence of my little Joan?

Not as a child but as a woman had she spoken last night when she said—“Tell me the story of my life and I shall have the right to listen to you.” There could be no rest for me, no thought of man’s love for her until the record proved her not the daughter of General Fordibras, but his victim. I had been conscious of this from the beginning, but the inevitability of it recurred to me now when the great ship had disappeared from my ken, and all my hopes seemed to sink with her. To win Joan’s love I must snatch her secret from a rogue’s keeping, carry it triumphantly to her, and so write it that all the world might read. God alone knew how such a task as this might be accomplished. I wonder not that its very magnitude appalled me.

And so the new day waxed old, and found me still alone, my eyes upon the void; my heart heavy with the burden I must carry. The great sea had spoken and I had heard her voice and bowed to the destiny of her judgments. Let the land now answer me—that land for which my friends yearned as exiles, who have heard a call from home and answered it with tears of gladness because their faces are toward the light.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

WE HEAR OF THE JEW AGAIN.

*Once More in London.*

I am not one of those who touch the posts by Temple Bar with that rare delight which betrays the true-blue Londoner. Foreign scenes are ever a safer tonic to me than any fret and striving of our own cities; and gladly as I turn to London sometimes, it is rarely that I do not quit her shadows with a greater pleasure. Perhaps I am conscious of a subtle change creeping upon her, and destroying much of her charm. To me she seems as the great growing child which has lost its strength in the act. Vast beyond all belief, her energies are perceptibly weakening. She is no longer an example to the provinces; they do not imitate her fashions, and are ready to scoff at her pretensions. The old London of the gloomy theatres, the narrow, dirty streets, the London of Simpson's and Evans', and the decent supper rooms, was a thousand times more romantic a city in my eyes than this County Council Babylon, with its raucous prophets and its perpetual cant of moralities. Let the blame be on my head which dares to think such treason. I am lonely in wide streets, and the gospel of modernity depresses me.

Unrepentant, I write these lines, and yet they can conjure up for me a vision of London so desired that all the years will never blot it from my memory. I had been in England two months then. A littered writing table in my private sitting-room at a great Strand hotel bore witness to my activities—an untasted elixir in a wineglass by my side spoke of a woman's anxieties and of her devotion. Certainly my dear sister Harriet had sufficiently impressed upon these people the necessity of treating all carpets and curtains by an antiseptic process, and the profound wisdom of warming the interiors of those hats which subsequently were to adorn the heads of males. Her debates with a German Prince in command, neither understanding the tongue of the other, were a little protracted, and not always without heat. She was determined that I should not cut my finger-nails with unaired scissors, and convinced that the only way of saving me from the troubles which beset the path of my indifference lay in the frequent administration of advertised tonics, and a just sampling of the whole of them. I suffered her and was happy. Is it not something that there should be one woman in all the world who lives for us a life so wholly unselfish that no thought of her own needs ever enters into it?

To my dear sister, then, be this well-earned tribute paid. Doubly fortunate, I might write down another name and spare no encomiums. Joan Fordibras, my little Joan of Dieppe and the sunshine, was with us in the hotel, and no less a slave of mine than the other. Every day, when I came down to breakfast, it was Joan who



had been across to Covent Garden for the flowers I like best to have about me—it was Joan's clever fingers which delved amidst the mass of littered papers and unfaithfully extracted therefrom the erring document; Joan who told me at night what had happened during the day in this dismal world of politics and art—the world in which we amuse ourselves by calling those who differ from us knaves and decrying all merit save that which makes its own appeal to us. Rarely did I find her in that merry mood of girlhood in which I caught her—how long ago it seemed!—at the Fête at Kensington. If her face betrayed the sea's dower of heightened colour and eyes unspeakably blue, she had become less the child and more the woman, and she lived as one tortured between two rivers of doubt—knowing the past and fearing the future, but unconscious of the present. Between us there stood the impassable barrier of the truce we arrived at upon the deck of my yacht, *White Wings*. I was never again to tell her what she was and must be to me—never to speak of a man's love prevailing above all else, more precious to him than all else under God's fair sky; never to speak of it until I could carry the secret to her and say—"This is your birthright, such were the days of your childhood." I had pledged my word, and the bond was of honour. Time might redeem it or time might bring the ultimate misfortune upon me—I knew not nor had the courage to prophesy.

So London became the city of my desire, and in London my work began. I saw Joan every day, heard the music of her laughter, and was conscious of her presence about me as man is ever aware of the spirit of happiness which hovers so rarely about a busy life. The littered table in my private room bore witness to my activities, and the animation with which I had pursued them. Many ambitions have I set before me to worship in the years of the old time, but never such a task as this; whose achievement must bring a reward beyond price; whose failure, I was aware, would separate me finally and for ever from the woman I love.

To say that I laboured at it incessantly, indeed, is to do little justice to actuality. The mystery went with me wherever I turned. I wrestled with it through nights of bitter dreaming; it followed me to the streets, to the theatres, to the houses of my friends. It prevailed above every other occupation; it would start up even in the blue eyes which daily asked the unspoken question; it would envelop little Joan herself as a veil which hid her true self from me; it would stand out black and clear upon every page that I wrote—a sentence irrevocable, a very torture of the doubt. The secret, or the years of darkness, said the voice. I hid myself from the light and still I heard its message. It spoke to me above the city's clamour and the hum of throngs. The secret, or the night! What an alternative was that!

I was to go to Joan and to say to her—You are the daughter of this man or that, but not of General Fordibras. I was to tell her that none of hers had part or lot in the great conspiracy of crime whose fringe I had touched, whose arch-priest I had named. Here was the task in a nutshell, so simple seemingly that any dunce might have entered upon it with confidence or any child sat down to master it. Yet, witness the uncertain steps I had followed, and judge then what kind of a task it was and what the peculiar nature of my difficulties. Judge then if I misrepresent the

circumstance or claim for myself that which truth has not justified.

We had made a fair passage home from the Azores and come straight to London. Losing none of the precious hours, I went immediately to Scotland Yard, and from Scotland Yard to a friendly Minister's room at Whitehall, and there I told this story as it is written in this book, and as time has not changed it. If I met with incredulity, I blame no one. My cables home had warned the police of much that I would tell them, and more that remained mere surmise. Murray himself—my old friend Murray, whose suppositions had sent me upon an errand as strange as any in his calendar—Murray assured me that the police of France, of Germany, of America, and of Portugal were already advised of that which had been done, and of the evidence upon which it was being done. But even he had begun to lose faith.

“We have searched the houses you named in Paris,” he said, “and there are half a dozen men under lock and key. They have arrested five in Berlin, and the world has read the story of the coup made in New York. To be frank with you, that is all we can do. This Jew of yours appears in none of these successes. He is not named anywhere. There is no trace of him—not a word, or a letter, or a trinket. The Governor of the Island of Santa Maria declares that the mines there are just what they pretend to be; that he has been over them with General Fordibras, and that he finds the General a very simple, soldierly gentleman. As to your Diamond Ship—they will believe in that when she comes to port. I have traced the various steamers you have named to me, and their papers are in all cases correct. To be candid, Dr. Fabos, if the Jew himself had come to this office, I should have had no evidence to offer against him. There is only one of his company threatened so far by your revelations, and she is Miss Fordibras.”

We laughed together, and I showed him at once that I was not disappointed.

“You are face to face with a master,” I exclaimed, “and you expect to find child's toys in his hands. If Valentine Imroth is to be hanged by any thieves' den in Germany or in Paris—to say nothing of London—then he is a hundred miles from being the man I met at Santa Maria, or that brother Jew who commands the Diamond Ship. Do not believe it, Murray. The success of this organisation is a success of delegation. Nine out of ten men in Imroth's employ have never heard his name, never seen him, or become aware of his existence. The greater rogues, who form his cabinet, are as little likely to be taken in any *café des assassins* as the Jew himself is likely to make a speech at Westminster. We have touched the fringe of a splendid fabric, but threads of it only are in our hands. To-day, at the Admiralty, Sir James Freeman tells me that a second cruiser will be despatched to the South Atlantic next week. If they discover the derelict, I shall be astounded. Ask me for a reason and I can give you none. It is mere premonition. Sitting here in London I can depict that sagging hulk as clearly as if I watched her from the deck of my own yacht. She is drifting there, peopled by devils, a ship of blood and death—drifting God knows where, without hope, or idea, or haven. She may so drift to the Day of Judgment, but man will never discover her. That is my belief. I have no reason for it—I admit freely that it is ridiculous.”

Murray did not quarrel with my point of view, but assuredly he could not help me. No trace of Imroth had been discovered; Fordibras had not been arrested, nor had any news of him come from Santa Maria. The house there, I understood, was shut up, and the so-called miners had left many weeks ago in a steamer for Europe. The most diligent search had revealed none of those caverns of treasure which I believed (and still believe) to exist. There were implements for drilling and blasting, forges, cranes, and cartridges, but of secret habitation, none. The Valley House was declared to be an American's whim, the mountain passage one of old existence, and perfectly well known to every inhabitant. Such simplicity I judged to have been bought at a handsome price. Gold alone could have set these people's tongues wagging so pleasantly.

"They are bought to a man, Murray," I said; "and unless we care to pay a higher price, we may trouble them no more. In my view they are not the only recipients of this man's oily bounty. I would venture to say that he has friends enough in some of the South American republics to save an army from the gallows. We will take it at that and leave it there. If the Park Lane people do not care to carry it further, I have no interest. You cannot arrest this man, you say, because there is no evidence against him. That must be told him when we meet—it shall be part of the price I pay for his secret. Such a secret I am determined to force from him if I lose my life in the venture. Nothing else concerns me now, Murray. Let a thousand criminals go down to the sea in ships, and I am unmoved. His secret—my task begins and ends with that."

He did not understand me wholly, nor would I unbosom myself to him. The partial failure of my voyage could not but result in such incredulity as I met everywhere at home. Nor might I blame a shrewd officer for saying frankly that there was at present no evidence that could be read in court against Valentine Imroth. His treasure had been successfully hidden from every human eye. A friendly Government sheltered him; his dupes seemed unable to betray him. The spell that he cast had been powerful to protect him even in his absence. I saw more plainly than ever that the final scene must be between the arch-roguer and myself—even at the peril of my life.

And how should this be, you ask? How might I draw from the shadows a man fearing the light; one for whom the police of five nations were supposed to be seeking—a man who would as soon come to England, you might say, as venture into the jaws of hell? Let the circumstance answer me. I had a letter from the Jew himself three days after Murray assured me that all the talent of Europe could not discover him. Twenty-four hours later one of the fastest steam launches on the River Thames carried me from London Bridge to a house which should give all or deny me all before another dawn had broken. These were the truths, and they need no ornament of mine. I was going to the Jew's house, and Okyada, my little Jap, alone went with me. Let the circumstance speak, I say, for it is worth a thousand guesses. The greatest criminal alive, as I believed this man to be, had asked me to go to him, and I had answered "yes." So shall the record stand—even, as it would seem, this

surpassing folly—for a woman's sake, as so much folly and wisdom have been since man's world began.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### THE MASTER CARD.

#### *We Visit Canvey Island.*

The Jew had written to me, I say, and I had answered his letter. In a few brief sentences, worthy of the man and his story, he put me upon my honour and recited the compact between us.

*“To Dr. Fabos, of London, from the Master of the Ship.*

*“At Canvey Island, to which you will come alone or with your servant at the most (such attendants as your launch brings being careful not to land), I will await you at sundown on the afternoon of the Fifth day of May. Fear nothing, as I am unafraid. The word is no less sacred to me than to you. I pass it and bid you come.”*

Whence, then, had this strange letter been delivered, and how had I falsified the fine phrases of the police and communicated with the Jew? The truth shall be told with all the brevity I can command.

There is published thrice every month in Paris a pretendedly comic paper, called the *Journal des Polissons*. Ostensibly a journal *pour rire*, a poor man's *Punch* and jester, it is, as I have long known, a sure means by which one thief may communicate with another, or any assassin make known his hiding place to his friends. This knowledge I employed directly it became plain to me that Valentine Imroth had escaped the meshes of the law's clumsy net, and defied a police which vainly protested that there was no evidence against him. I advertised in the paper in the common cryptogram of the Polish societies. Making no effort to be clever, I intimated to the Master of the Ship that I could be of the greatest service to him if he, in his turn, were willing to be of some little service to me. This letter, so amazing and so many are the eyes which watch the Jew's career, was answered before a week had run. In a sentence I learned that the so-called Master was in hiding on Canvey Island—that desolate marsh beyond Tilbury, familiar to all who go down to the Nore in ships. There he would see me and hear my news. There I must challenge him and be answered—ah, what would I not have given to know in what manner he would answer me!

It is not to be supposed that I claim any merit of this voyage or was unaware of its peculiar dangers. The Jew knew perfectly well with whom he had to deal, and I might reasonably argue that he would never be madman enough to attempt anything against me at a moment when I could render him a service of such magnitude as that

I proposed. To be frank, I found the whole business not less humiliating than that former failure in mid-ocean, which will remain the supreme misfortune of my career. Here was I, who had set out to hunt this man down, about to say to him—"Go your way; I have done with you. The police say there is no evidence against you. It is their affair, and I will take no further part in it." He, on his part, must guess that I came to him in some such mood. Canvey Island, I remembered, could be easily gained from the open sea, and just as easily from the shore of Essex. There would be a hundred eyes watching the coming of my launch, spies afloat and spies ashore, a launch of his own, perhaps, and certainly every expedient his subtle mind could contrive against any treachery that might be contemplated against him. He would trust me with a sword naked to his hand as it were. On my side, I might go safely while we agreed—but let us quarrel, and then heaven help me, I said.

Thus, in a word, the situation lay. I staked my life, not upon the honour of Valentine Imroth, but upon a human interest I believed powerful enough to protect me. And this step I took that I might return to Joan and say: "Here is the truth; here is the story which you and I will guard while we live." The danger could be nothing to me in the face of that which success must mean. I was as a miner lifting his pick for the last time. What hopes and fears I carried to that lonely island, what a burden of doubt and dread!

I shall say nothing of my voyage down the Thames, nor of those scenes so often described, and with such feeling, by some of our later day novelists. To me the lower river is ever an echo of the voice of the agitated Pepys, or the more stately tones of the pious Evelyn. A changed river since the great ships deserted the wharves by London Bridge, none the less, she is, in a sense, still the great highway to the kingdoms of the world. Here is that water temple which the giant masts wall in; here all tongues are eloquent of the worship of the sea; here men of all nations commingle in that rare confraternity which has earned our wealth and established our greatness while the centuries have run. A river it is of curdling pools and racing tides, of towering stages and gabled houses; a river of mystery and of darkness, beloved of the city which has deserted her, inseparable from the story of its people. To her true disciples, then, be the keeping of the record. My launch carried me too speedily by creek and pool that I should claim to be of the elect.

Now, we had left St. Katherine's wharf late in the afternoon, and it was almost dark when the great orb of the Chapman Light came to our view. A rough diagram on the back of the Jew's letter had indicated to me where I must land upon the island, and at what point his servants would wait for me. Had I been in doubt, a green lantern swinging by the low wall of an ancient farmhouse—the first you see when the island comes to your view—would have called my attention to the place and invited me to go ashore there. I had by consent passed my word to take none but Okyada to the meeting, and faithful to the promise he alone followed me to the landing stage and prepared to go up to the house with me. The launch itself had been lent to me by Messrs. Yarrow, and was commanded by one of their engineers. I did not dare to ask even Captain Larry to be with me upon such a night—and as

for my friend, the loquacious Timothy, it would have been madness to bring him. The Jew had told me in the plainest terms that my very life depended upon a faithful interpretation of the terms of the compact, and I knew my man too well to doubt his meaning. This lonely shore, I said again, would be watched by a hundred eyes. And what eyes! Truly a man might peer into those gloomy shadows and believe this to be the haven of ultimate Melancholy, the home of those unresting spirits the great river had carried out from the stress and storms of the city's life. A chill hand of Nature's death had touched it. Its very breath was as a pest.

An old negro stood on the landing stage as the launch came alongside, and he it was who carried the lantern. No one else appeared to be about, though I heard a whistle blown sharply, and answered by another toward the Essex shore. The negro himself hid his face as much as possible from me, nor did he utter a single word or betray the slightest emotion at my coming. I noticed, however, that he waited for the launch to cast a little way into the river before he moved from the stage; and when this was done and the whistle had been sounded a second time, he led the way up a narrow grassy path to the farmhouse, and quietly left me at its door. Night had quite come down by this time, and a dank white mist began to rise above the marshes. The farmhouse itself appeared to be a structure built by some honest Dutchman who had helped to save Canvey Island from the sea when Essex was still washed by the waters of the estuary. A single light burned in one of its windows, but elsewhere it was dark as the river which flowed so blackly before its gates.

I knocked three times upon an ancient door, and was answered immediately by a trim maidservant. Yes, she said, Mr. Imroth was at home and expecting me. And so she ushered me into the presence of that master criminal for whom the police had searched the cities of the world.

Seated in a low arm-chair in a little room at the front of the house—a poor, shabby apartment, furnished with no better taste than a Margate lodging house, I perceived that Valentine Imroth wore a green shade low over his eyes, but not so low as to impair his vision; while the chair he had placed for me and the lamp set upon the table would permit him to follow every passing thought of mine with the eyes of a human artist upon whom nothing is lost. Careless in his attitude, he smoked an immense cigar with evident satisfaction, and had by his side a black bottle, which, as I knew by its shape, should contain Hollands gin. In many ways a changed man from the Jew I had met upon the heights at Santa Maria, the ferocious aspect of him was but little abated; and as though to emphasise it, he had laid a great stick by the side of his chair while one of the ugliest boar hounds I have ever seen blinked at his feet, and lifted a savage head silently at my coming. These things I observed instantly, and drew my own conclusions from them, "He is not armed," I said, "but somewhere near by his friends are concealed—the dog would hold me if he gave the word, and half a score of ruffians would do the rest." A place of peril surely—and yet I had known that it must be so when I set out to meet him.

I put my hat upon the floor and drew the chair a little back from the table to which it had been drawn up.

“I am here,” I said shortly, “in answer to your letter. The conditions upon which we meet are faithfully observed between us. My servant is waiting for me at your door, and my launch is out in the river. Let us get to business at once. That, I hope, is your wish.”

He thrust the shade back upon his forehead, and showed me a pair of red-limned eyes, watery and blinking as the dog’s at his feet. The long thin hand which held the cigar seemed to be silver-backed like a brush, with nails as black as ebony. An immense diamond glittered upon his little finger. Like all his fellows, he had not conquered the love of personal display even at his age, which could not have been less than eighty years.

“It is my hope,” he repeated, not without dignity—which, however, he lost instantly in the manner of a broker of Houndsditch selling shabby furniture—“to see the great Dr. Fabos of London, to have him in my house; that is an honour for an humble old man. What have I done to deserve it?—how has this pleasure come into a poor old life?”

He tittered like some old witch making a peat fire by a roadside. But it was the laughter of a vanity not to be hushed, and I passed it by with a gesture.

“The pleasure came into your house at your own invitation,” I rejoined. “It will go again very shortly by the same road. Please give me your attention. I am here neither for mutual expressions of self-admiration nor the desire of your amiable company. In a word, I have come to ask you for the story of Joan Fordibras.”

He nodded his head, still tittering, and leaned back in his chair to survey me with a closer circumspection.

“The great Dr. Fabos of London,” he repeated, “here in the house of the poor old Jew! How I am complimented; how I am honoured! The great English doctor who has followed a poor old man all round the world, and has come here to beg a favour of him at last! Repeat your question, doctor—ask me many times. The words are music to me, I drink them in like wine—the words of my dear friend the doctor; how shall I ever forget them?”

It was horrible to hear him cackle; more horrible still to remember that a single word of his uttered aloud to the men who watched us (for I believe that we were watched) would have cost me my life upon the instant. How to continue I hardly knew. Long minutes passed and found him still worming and cackling in the chair as an old hag above a reddening fire. I had nothing further to say—it was for him to proceed.

“Yes, yes, my dear,” he continued presently, falling boldly into the language of his race. “Yes, yes; you are the great Dr. Fabos of London, and I am the poor old Jew. And you would know the story of the little Joan Fordibras! How small the world is that we should meet here in this shabby house—the poor old Jew and the rich doctor. And so you come to me after all for help! It is the Jew who must help you to your marriage; the Jew who shall save the little girl for her lover. Ah, my dear, what a thing is love, and what fools are men! The great rich doctor to leave his home, his friends, his country, to spend the half of his fortune upon a ship—all for



love, and that he might see the poor old Jew again. I have never heard a better thing—God of my fathers, it is something to have lived for this!”

He repeated this many times as though the very words were meat and drink to him. I began to perceive that he was the victim of an inordinate vanity, and that my own failure was dearer to him than a gift of millions would have been.

“Do I want money?” he asked presently, turning upon me almost savagely. “Heaven hear me, it is as dirt beneath my feet. Do I want fine houses, halls of marble, and gowns of silk? Look at the room in which I live. Consider my circumstance, my fortune, my riches, the clothes upon my back, the servants who wait upon me! Money, no—but to see the great men humbled—to strike at their fortunes, at their hearts; ah, that is something the poor old Jew would die for!”

“Here to-night my reward begins. The great Dr. Fabos comes to me upon his knees to beg me the gift of a woman’s heart. How many have so come since I was this doctor’s age—a young man, spurned by his people, a fool, living honestly, a worshipper in temples made by man? And to all, I have said as I say to him, no, a thousand times, no! Get you gone from me as they have gone. Admit that the Jew is your master after all. Live to remember him—bear the brand upon your heart, the curse which he has borne at your people’s will, at the bidding of their faith. So I answer you, Dr. Fabos. Such are my words to you—the last time we shall ever meet, who knows, perhaps the last day you may have to live.”

He leaned forward, and from his eyes there seemed to shine a light of all the fires of evil that ever burned in human breast. No man, I believe, has listened to such a threat as he uttered against me this night. The very tones of it could freeze the blood at the heart, the gestures were those of one who lusted for human blood with all the voracity of an animal. I will not deny that I shivered while I heard him. Remember the remote farmhouse, the lonely marsh, the silence of the night, the stake at issue between us. Who shall wonder if my words were slow to come?

“You threaten me,” I said with some composure, “and yet, as a student of your race, I should have thought that the hour for threats had not come. I am here to ask you to do me a service, but at the same time to suggest an equivalent that might not be unacceptable to you. Let us consider the matter from a purely business basis, and see if we cannot arrive at an understanding. You must be perfectly aware that I do not come empty-handed——”

He interrupted me with a savage cry, so startling that it amazed me.

“Fool!” he cried; “I am the master of the fortunes of kings. What can you bring that is of any value to me?”

I answered him immediately—

“The liberty of your wife, Lisette, who was arrested in Vienna this morning.”

It was as though I had struck a blow at his heart. The cry that escaped his lips might have come from the very depths of hell; I have never seen a human face so distorted by the conflicting passions of love and hate and anger. Gasping, a horrid sound in his throat, he staggered to his feet and felt nervously for the cudgel at his side—the great hound leaped up and stiffened every limb.

“Keep that dog back, or, by God! I will kill you where you stand,” I cried, and every word I spoke thrilling me as a desire gratified, I turned his mockery upon him. “Here is the great Dr. Fabos of London come into his own at last, you see. Fool, in your turn, did you think that you dealt with a child? The woman is in gaol, I say. My money has put her there—I alone can set her free—I alone, Valentine Imroth. Listen to that and beg her freedom on your knees—you devil amongst men; kneel to me or she shall pay the uttermost farthing. Now will you hear me, or shall I go? Your wife, Lisette, the little French brunette from Marseilles—did I not tell you at Santa Maria that I had the honour of her acquaintance? Fool to forget it—fool! for by her you shall pay.”

The words came from my lips in a torrent of mad eloquence I could not restrain. I had played the master card, and was as safe in this house from that moment as though a hundred of my friends were there to guard me. The Jew lay stricken at my feet. Ghastly pale, his hands palsied, his limbs quivering as with an ague, he sank slowly back into the chair, his eyes searching my own in terror, his whole manner that of one who had not many moments to live.

“My wife, Lisette—yes, yes—it would be by her. I am an old man, and you will have pity—speak and tell me you will have pity—you are Dr. Fabos of London! What harm has the poor old Jew done you? Oh, not her, for the love of God—I will tell you what you wish, give me time—I am an old man, and the light fades from my eyes—give me time and I will tell. Lisette—yes, yes—I am going to her at Buda, and she is waiting for me. Devil, you would not keep me from Lisette——”

I poured some spirit into a glass and put it to his lips.

“Listen,” I said. “Your wife is arrested, but I can set her free. Write truly the story of Miss Fordibras, and a cable from me this night shall obtain her liberty. I will listen to no other terms. Joan Fordibras’ story—that is the price you must pay—here and now, for I will give you no second chance——”

It would be vain to speak of the scene that followed, the muttering, the piteous entreaty, the hysterical outbursts. I had never made so astounding a discovery as that which told me, a week before I left England in my yacht, that this old man had married a young wife in Paris, and that—such are the amazing contrasts of life—he loved her with a devotion as passionate as it was lasting. The knowledge had saved me once already at Santa Maria; to-night it should save my little Joan, and take from her for ever the burden of doubt. Not for an instant did my chances stand in jeopardy. Every word that I spoke to this abject figure brought me one step nearer to my goal. They were as words of fire burning deep into a dotard’s heart.

“Lisette,” I continued, seeing him still silent. “Lisette is charged with the possession of certain jewels once the property of Lady Mordant. I am the witness who has identified those jewels. Your dupe, Harry Avenhill, who came up to rob my house in Suffolk, is the man who will charge this woman with her crime and establish the case against her. Whether we go to Vienna or persuade Lady Mordant to withdraw the charge, it is for you to say. I will give you just ten minutes by that clock upon your chimney. Use them well, I implore you. Think what you are doing

before it is too late to think at all—the liberty this woman craves or the charge and punishment. Which is it to be, old man? Speak quickly, for my time is precious.”

For a little while he sat, his hands drumming the table, his eyes half closed. I knew that he was asking himself what would be the gain or the loss should he beckon some one from the shadows to enter the house and kill me. One witness would thus be removed from his path—but who would answer for the others? And was it possible that his old enemy, who had outwitted him so often, would be outwitted to-night? This seemed to me his argument. I watched him rise suddenly from his chair, peer out to the darkness, and as suddenly sit again. Whether his courage had failed him or this were the chosen moment for the attack, I shall never be able to say with certainty. For me it was an instant of acute suspense, of nervous listening for footsteps, of quick resolution and prompt decision. Let there be an echo of a step, but one sound without, I said, and I would shoot the man where he sat. Thus was I determined. In this dread perplexity did the instant pass.

“I cannot write,” he gasped at last. “Put your questions to me, and I will answer them.”

“And sign the document I have brought with me. So be it—the questions are here, in order. Let your answers be as brief.”

I sat at the head of the table and spread the document before me. The lamp shed a warm aureole of light upon the paper, but left the outer room in darkness. My words were few, but deliberate; his answers often but a mutter of sounds.

“Joan Fordibras, whose daughter is she?”

“The daughter of David Kennard of Illinois.”

“Her mother?”

“I am not acquainted with her name—a French Canadian. The records in Illinois will tell you.”

“How came she to be the ward of this man Fordibras?”

“His cowardice—his conscience, as men call it. Kennard was charged with the great safe robberies of the year 1885—he was innocent. They were my planning—my agents executed them. But Kennard—ah, he betrayed me, he would have stood in my path, and I removed him.”

“Then he was convicted?”

“He was convicted and sentenced to twenty years’ imprisonment. Fordibras, under the name of Changarnier—his real name—he is the cousin of that Changarnier who did France much mischief in the year 1870—Fordibras was then the Governor of the Sing Sing prison on the Hudson River. He was in my pay, but David Kennard had been his friend, and he took the daughter and brought her up as his own child. I did not forbid it—why should I? A woman, if she is pretty, is useful to my purposes. I wished to humble this man of iron, and I have done so. Pshaw, what a figure he cuts to-day! Skulking in Tunis like a paltry cutpurse—afraid of me, afraid but proud, my friend—proud, proud, as one of your great nobles. That is Hubert Fordibras. Speak a word to the police, and you may arrest him. Hush—I will send you evidence. He is proud, and there is heart in him. Tear it out, for he is a

traitor. He has shut his eyes and held out his hands, and I have put money into them. Tear the heart out of him, for he will kill the woman you love.”

I ignored the savage treachery of this, its brutality and plain-spoken hatred. The General’s pride must have been a bitter burden to this creeping scoundrel with his insufferable vanities and his intense desire to abase all men before him. The quarrel was nothing to me—I could well wish that Hubert Fordibras might never cross my path again.

“Traitor or not—it is your concern,” I said. “There is another question here. When Joan Fordibras wore my stolen pearls in London, was the General aware that they were stolen?”

A smile, revoltingly sardonic, crossed his ashen face.

“Would he have the brains? She wore them at my dictation. I had long watched you—you did not know it, but knowledge was coming to you. I said that you must be removed from my path. God of heaven! Why were you not struck dead before Harry Ross lay dead on Palling beach?”

“The young seaman who was found with the Red Diamond of Ford Valley in his possession! The brother of Colin Ross who took your place upon the *Ellida*? I begin to understand—he was carrying those jewels to London, and an accident overtook him? That was a grave misfortune for you.”

He clenched his hands and looked me full in the face.

“Had he lived I would have torn him limb from limb. He stole the jewels from my dispatch boat and was drowned escaping to shore. My friend, the good God was merciful to him that He let him die.”

I could not but smile at piety so amazing. In truth a new excitement had seized upon me, and my desire to escape the house had now become a fever of impatience. What if an accident befell me, or an agent of evil stood suddenly between Joan and my tidings! How if the cup were dashed from my lips at the last moment! Good God! What an agony, even in imagination!

“Mr. Imroth,” I said, rising upon the impulse. “I will cable at once to Vienna, saying that I have no evidence to offer, and the girl Lisette will be discharged. Go where you will, but leave England. To-night I spare you. But should you cross my path again, I will hang you as surely as there is an Almighty God to judge your deeds and punish you for them. That is my last word to you. I pray with all my soul that I shall never see your face again.”

He did not move, uttered no sound, sat like a figure of stone in his chair. And so I left him and went out into the night.

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For I was going to Joan, to bear to her the supreme tidings of my message, to lay this gift of knowledge at her feet, and in those eyes so dear to read the truth which, beyond all else on earth, was my desire.

# EPILOGUE.

## THE EPILOGUE OF TIMOTHY McSHANUS, JOURNALIST.

My friend Mulock in his “Magnus and Morna,” has written that “ye should drink at a wedding with discerning lest you lose the way upon a straight road afterwards.” ’Tis no man I am to quarrel with a precept so honest or a reflection upon matrimony so prudent. We shall drink at the Goldsmith Club this night to the lost liberty of my dear comrade Ean Fabos, and would that it could be with that same measure the poet speaks of. If I doubt me of the possibility, ’tis to remember with Horace, that wine is mighty to inspire new hopes, and able to drown the bitterness of cares. Shall we reflect upon this loss to our club, and to society, with parched throats, and a hand upon the soda-water syphon? Bacchus and the Corybantes forbid! We will drown it in the best—at my dear friend’s request, and, as he would wish it, ah, noble heart!—at his expense.

He was married at the Parish Church in Hampstead, you should know, and Timothy McShanus it was who gave the bride away. The little witch of a shepherdess that has carried honest men twice round the world and back again, set other women weeping, and come at last to that sure port which Destiny had built for her—was she changed from the black-eyed minx I saw at Kensington, less mischievous, less sprightly, more of a woman, not so much the pretty child of the school-books? No, I say, a thousand times, no! There is golden light about her path, and all the spirits of laughter shine in her eyes. Could I search all the cities for a wife for my friend, this is the dear heart I would choose for him; this the companion I would name for his blessing. She has won a brave man’s love, and is happy therein. God be good to her, says old Timothy—and he is one that has read the heart of women.

So am I cast out again to the familiar haunts, a wanderer once more, a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles. My dear friend, it is true, remembering that I have eaten the food of the law, drunk its port and paid its fees, would make of me a Government man and an official. But my heart fails me. I am grown old in the sin of indolence. If I have a merit, it is that I know the blessings of doing nothing and the salary that should be expected therefrom. Let me continue henceforth in paths so straight, in ways so ancient. My friendship for Ean Fabos is too precious that men should call me a gatherer of moss and a roller of stones.

And this is to say that henceforth I have no career; that like the little Jap, of whom my friend has almost made a son, henceforth my place is at the gate without. Must I be a “past” to Ean Fabos, dear to his memory, one of his household but voiceless as the night, unhonoured, unremembered, unsung? The gods forbid, I say. The book that I am writing upon our adventures in the South Seas—shortly to be

published in one volume at six shillings—that book shall be my monument more lasting than brass. You will find many things in it, reader, much for the improvement of your mind, and the elevation of your intellect—but above all you shall find a love and devotion to Dr. Fabos which is the truest instinct of my eventful life.

And he is married and is gone to the West, and I am alone and in sorrow, and the doors of the Club are open to me. Many men and cities have I seen, but London—ah! blessed art thou, London, for the desolate shall make their home with thee, and the children that are orphans shall nestle at thy bosom. In the Metropolis of the British Empire, then, let this sorrow of mine be buried.

For hither shall my friend Ean return when the days of summer have waned, and his little wife begins to speak of home and of those who love him and have not forgotten.

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### **Transcriber's Notes:**

Punctuation and type-setting errors have been corrected without note. Archaic spellings and hyphenation have been retained.

[The end of *The Diamond Ship* by Max Pemberton]