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WINDS OF FORTUNE

BY JEFFERY FARNOL

SAMPSON LOW
25 Gilbert Street London W1

New Impression 1951

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To
CAPTAIN FRANK SHAW
I DEDICATE THIS ROMANCE
IN
TRUEST AFFECTION
AND
MESSMATE AHOY!

When the Sun is over the foreyard,
forget not thy friend

Brighton, 1933 JEFFERY FARNOL.

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WINDS OF FORTUNE

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH I BEGIN MY ASTONISHING NARRATION

My nose I have never wished other than it is, for, though neither purely Greek nor classically Roman, it is yet of a delicate tho' sufficing assertiveness and suits the fashion of my countenance to a nicety. But then my eyes—large, darkly blue and long-lashed (thank Heaven)—are (alas!) too wide-set and beneath low sweep of brows themselves all too mannishly thick (though my woman Deborah will not have it so and crieth horror on my suggestion of plucking), tho' your slim, high-arching brows suggestive of a youthful surprised innocence be at present all the mode.

Yet these same eyes of mine (thanks to their shape, size and lashes aforesaid) can be emotionally various as and when I will; thus, my mirror assures me, they can instantly flame to a steadfast scorn, flash most passionate resentment or swoon with a tender languishment, and all extreme convincingly.

Then again (and oh, the pity on't) my mouth, though naturally vivid, is (alack) too large for beauty's perfection and do I attempt to pout in rosebud fashion, it showeth too altogether detestably luscious. Howsoever, my teeth being white and even, instead of pouting I can smile engagingly.

As to my person, I am neither too tall nor too short, of shape truly feminine and very justly proportioned; in this Nature hath shown such discriminating kindness that I, in gratitude therefor, take pains to set off her noble handiwork to fullest advantage. As, for instance, the patch so justly placed a little below my right eye and the artful disorder of my auburn hair, loose braided and caught in curls (four) above my left ear. Also, being long and graciously limbed, I detest these hooped petticoats and distortionate panniers beneath which deformity may go all unsuspect; thus myself doth favour the soft mystery of clinging draperies that may, as it were, shadow forth some vision of the delectable truth they hide.

Thus then Ursula Revell (that is, myself) doth stand confessed, *ætat.* twenty-three, very serenely conscious of her good points bodily and mental, and grieving (albeit secretly) for her bad, yet with faith in herself and her destiny and therefore nothing diffident.

And I have revealed myself with this precise exactitude that such as may chance to read this narration shall know in some sort what manner of creature was I who sat in my boudoir beneath the dexterous hands of my devoted maid Deborah, all unwitting the singular adventures, dire perils, horrific fears, woeful doubts and fierce joys that were to commence for me upon that sunny afternoon of July, in the year of Grace Seventeen Hundred and Two.

"Beyond all question," said I, turning to glimpse the curve of my neck in the looking-glass, "I shall never marry him, Deborah."

"La now, Miss Ursula, ma'm, why ever not?" bleated Deborah. "And him a Vi-count, such great gentlemen! And what's more, one as you can't judge, seeing, ma'm, as you've never seen him—"

"Not since childhood, but I've heard so much of him, Deb, that I already despise him perfectly."

"Oh, ma'm, and him your uncle's very own choice."

"And this of itself is sufficing reason to refuse him since my Uncle Crespin's choice is not and never could be mine.... And so indecently sudden! Besides, I've no mind to be wed; marriage at best is an odious business to women of sentiment."

"But, Mistress Ursula, I declare!" gasped Deborah, "oh, la, ma'm, if all women thought so, where should us all be? And you to say so, Miss Ursula, you as so many fine gentlemen be so ready to die for! There was the Captain gentleman at the Wells, ever prepared to swound at your pretty feet."

"And a heartless fortune-hunting wretch!" quoth I.

"Well, the sweet young nobleman with the soulful eyes as writ you that pome—and the London *beaux* nigh a-fighting for to hand you from your coach and chair, whenso you go to Town! And the dooel as was fit over you in Lincoln Inn Fields last time! Oh, you to speak so against holy wedlock, and so many fine men a-dying to wife you!"

"This," said I, rising, "this is why I esteem horses nobler creatures than men. Howbeit, I'll surely never be wed by this Viscount wretch—"

"Ah, but Mistress Ursula, oh, my dearie, you was made for love sure and to mother pretty babes—"

"Horrors, woman! Hold thy naughty tongue—"

"But, ma'm—"

"Be silent!"

"Yes, Mistress Ursula, only if you so dare cross him, whatever will your uncle say?"

"Rage and curse, to be sure, Deborah, but then, so shall I, for to-day I mean to vindicate myself once and for all, and so away to Aunt Selina at Shalmeston."

"Oh, 'tis sad, grievous sad you should ha' been left an orphan so young!" sighed Deborah. "And nobody as do love ee true save ... only ... poor me!" Here she dropped a large tear upon my hand, whereupon I instantly kissed her comely face and cuddled her buxom form and snugged my head into the warm soft hollow of her neck and shoulder, clean forgetting the nicely ordered disorder of my hair.

"Sweet, true soul," said I, "dost know I love thee ... hast been my comfort many's the time ... thou'rt so fragrant and good and common-sensed—"

"And thou," she sobbed, "so lonely ever but for me ... and never to know a mother's tender care—"

"My mother!" said I, now weeping also, "my mother that died so young ... and I have sorely missed her ... to ha' known a mother's love 'stead o' the drunken tantrums of a sottish uncle—"

"Hist now, dearie ... you'm so headstrong wild and Sir Crespin be so turble fierce, and now if you disobey him—"

"I'm too old to be whipped these days, Deborah, and am my own mistress, thank God, to choose my own way, be it up or down. So pack and make ready, for I'll whisk thee away with me to Shalmeston. I'll ride my bay mare and you pillion with Gregory. Howbeit, Uncle Crespin shall not force me into wedlock 'gainst my will,—no, never!" said I, snapping my teeth on the word. "I'll not marry—an' I ever should, then the man who takes me to his heart shall be mine own choice; ay, by heavens, a choice serenely deliberate and based on sure knowledge of him—or I'll die a maid to lead apes in hell right joyfully!"

Thus said I, frowning on my reflection in the mirror and mighty determined, little recking (poor soul) what wild, outrageous wedding mine was to be indeed.

Then catching up riding cloak, hat and gauntlets, I went forth of my chamber and adown the wide stair to face my guardian uncle and dare my fate.

I found Sir Crespin somewhat fuddled, as was usual with him at this hour, sprawled in great elbowchair, his long peruke awry, coat and waistcoat loose and unbuttoned, and slopping wine-glass on his knee. Perceiving myself, he rose unsteadily, waved his glass in jovial salutation, dropped it, cursed it pettishly, filled another and favoured me with a staggering bow.

"Ha—hail!" quoth he, 'twixt gasp and hiccough. "Hail to the wi-witching bride! Adzooks, 'tis a blooming Hebe! No, 'slife, 'tis a glowing Venus! Barrasdale's a dev-lish fort'nate dog!"

"Uncle Crespin," said I in tone of disgust and turning to an adjacent mirror to set on my befeathered riding hat with due care, "you show more odious drunk than usual!"

"And th-thou ... thou'rt a pert minx to say so!" he stammered angrily and sank down in his chair again very sudden.

"Pray, is your Viscount arrived?" I demanded.

"Not yet—no, but ha' pa-patience, sweet carnality, aha, temper y'r hot blood—"

"Sir Crespin," cried I, my eyes instantly aflame with bitter scorn, "you are base as you seem! Be silent, sir, and hear me."

"Ha—silent? I? This to me—"

"Uncle Crespin, to serve some purpose of your own, you would marry me to a man I have never seen but know by report for a very rakehell—"

"Nay, faith; no more than is the gent-gentlemanly fashion, girl. We be all rakes and ever shall be whiles a man's a man and woman's the te-tempting—"

"He is also a drunkard, Uncle."

"Why, the lad drinks, as gentlemen must and should, but marriage shall settle him, I'll warrant—"

"Tho' not with me, Uncle Crespin. I'll none of him—"

"Hey? What—?"

"I utterly refuse even to contemplate such vile, detestable union, as I am here to tell his lordship whenso you produce him—"

"Why ... damme, will ye dare cross me then?" gasped my uncle, clawing himself up to his uncertain feet. "Ye curst termagant shrew, will ye dare me to—?"

"Uncle," said I, catching up the heavy riding whip that chanced to hand, "you know well how that I have dared you all my unhappy days. As a child, I nothing feared you, despite your slaps and whippings; as a woman and my own mistress, I despise you, yet was content to suffer you here at my house of Revelsmead—"

"Ha—suffer me, by God—"

"But, good uncle mine, three weeks ago you proposed this marriage to me first and I told you then I'd die rather. But now, Uncle, rather than endure the shame of such wedlock or become the victim of your schemes, I'll see this Viscount dead—ay, by my virginity and you too!"

"God's my life!" gasped my Uncle Crespin, actually recoiling before the menace of my look. "The wench threatens murder!" Then he clenched his great hands in sudden menace, but as he came at me, I raised the heavy whip and stepped to meet him... What shameful doings might have chanced I scarce dare think, nor is there need, for in this moment a strange voice stayed us, a something hoarse yet lazy voice at the open lattice.

"Dare I venture to intrude?"

Back reeled my uncle, to thud heavily into his elbowchair, and lowering the whip I turned, as in through the open casement came the neatly bewigged head and broad shoulders of a man; now, thinking him no other than this expected Viscount, I instantly flashed him a look of such passionate resentment that he blinked, bowed and withdrawing head and shoulders, into the room came a leg in long, dusty, spurred riding boot; then the other and finally himself, a very dusty person who flaunted weather-beaten hat and whose full-skirted coat showed something threadbare with hard usage. Hat thus aflourish, he bowed first to myself and then to Uncle Crespin. And so, for a moment, we were dumb all three. Then, to my surprise, my uncle demanded and most urgently:

"And who, sir, who a-plague may you be?"

Now at this I viewed the person with some faint feeling of interest.

A slim, lean man of no great stature, with bronzed visage nothing remarkable save for quick, bright eyes, an aggressive nose and a mouth whose grim lips (as he chanced to meet my look) curled up at me with sudden elfish quirk, at the which freedom be sure I frowned; and now, as he stood there, daring to smile on me, I sensed in this dusty, weather-beaten, sunburned fellow a quick tho' latent vitality and therewith a glimpse of such grimly fierce resolution that, despite his sleepy voice and ease of bearing, a very strangely sinister creature I thought him.

"You, sir," cried my Uncle Crespin, mighty imperious; "are ye deaf? D' ye hear me? Who are ye—hey?" The stranger turned him slowly and, seeming to view my uncle's flushed and angry face curiously, feature by feature, made answer in

his husky, languid voice.

"Sir, you may call me Captain Japhet Bly, hither despatched to convoy or shall we say escort your niece the lady Ursula, that I dare affirm is she that now doth so frown on me, safe to care of her aunt, my lady Brandon at Shalmeston Manor. And here, sir, my credentials."

From the bosom of his dingy coat, he drew a sealed letter but instead of putting it into my Uncle Crespin's clutching, outstretched hand, he gave it to me; so, breaking the seal I opened the letter and read this in my Aunt Selina's crabbed characters:

My sweet child Crespin writes me thou art to wed and from my house. So come to-day with the bearer of this and find a mother's welcome from

Your loving Aunt
SELINA.

Having read, I placed this letter on the table to my uncle's hand and he, having scanned it through, glared from it up to me.

"Ursula," quoth he, "begone to thy chamber!"

"Uncle," I answered, glancing into the mirror to see if my hat was properly set, "fare you well. Do I give Aunt Selina any message from you?"

"Damme—no!" cried he. "You bide here, madam, here at Revelsmead, I say—"

"Not so, Uncle," I murmured, drawing on my gauntlets, "I ride this moment for Shalmeston—"

"I forbid it!" he roared, upstarting to his feet. "I forbid ye to ride there, or any other where, madam, d'ye hear me? And alone too! And with this fellow, a stranger, a—"

"Captain Japhet Bly, sir," murmured the person, bowing, "very humbly at lady Ursula's service."

"And not alone, Uncle; my faithful Deborah rides with me."

Now here, chancing to glance at the person, I caught him regarding me with methought a something odd expression. And now my uncle, leaning towards me across the table, spake me in tone and with look that was almost an appeal.

"Ursula ... child, it was your dead parents' expressed wish and earnest desire that you should in fulness of time wed a Barrasdale of Aldbourne."

"Ay, truly," I answered, "but not *this* Viscount Barrasdale; it was his cousin they willed me to wed ... the gentle boy I mind so well that was my companion and playfellow years ago ... the poor boy that died or—"

Over crashed the table and my uncle made at me with such evident fury of purpose that once again I raised whip but, ere I could strike, the Captain person interposed, and with quick and almost incredible ease lifted Uncle Crespin struggling aloft and seated him, gasping and speechless, in his cushioned elbowchair.

"Sir," said the person, "an' your niece be ready, permit me in all humility to take my leave of you."

Now though his voice was sleepily soft as ever, very dreadfully changed showed the face of him, with eyes glaring atwixt narrowed lids and lips backdrawn from strong white teeth with such hateful look of animal ferocity as vastly disgusted and yet (I do confess) pleased me too, seeing how for once my formidable uncle cowered in dumb amaze.

And now it was that Deborah tapped at door and peeped in timidly to say the horses waited; so, with last look at my silenced uncle, I went forth of the chamber and out of my house of Revelsmead that never yet had been truly mine, and glancing round about me and up to the radiant sky, I drew deep breath of the fragrant sunny air and felt all my body atingle with a strange new rapture wonder-sweet. Then came Gregory with the horses and there too was the Captain person, hand down-reaching for my foot, to lift me into the saddle; but, misliking the man and his easy assurance, I set this proffered hand aside with my whip and beckoning Gregory, with his aid got me lightly (and as I think gracefully) to

horse and, chancing to glance at the person, saw him regarding me with his grimly quirkish smile. I found the creature became annoying and so glancing disdainful at his dusty boots and rusty spurs, addressed him directly for the first time.

"Sir," said I, suiting tone with look, and suffering my habit to reveal as much as it should but no more, "sir, for your proffered escort accept my gratitude and farewell."

"Madam," he answered, with sudden chuckling laugh (extreme odious), "I do begin to love this England better than I did."

Then, seeing Deborah vainly endeavouring to mount up behind Gregory, he lifted her to the pillion, ordered her petticoats, smiled up into her comely, blushing face, and swung himself astride his own sorry mount while I looked on, pondering his words.

And thus with him beside me (and all too near) and Gregory and Deborah behind, with the pack horses laden with such of my baggage and portmanteaus as Deborah deemed necessary to my proper comfort, I set forth on that road beset by shameful affrights that was to lead me through fury of battle and raging tempest, through hardship, suffering and perils a-many to that everlasting wonder of the which I had never dreamed. Now as to what this abiding wonder is, how it cometh and whence,—ye shall something know perchance that trouble to read patiently to the end of this, my astonishing narration. And thus, with the words wherewith I began, will I here end this my first chapter.

CHAPTER II

TELLETH HOW I, A POOR FENCELESS LAMB, FELL AMONG WOLVES YET BORE MYSELF NOTHING LAMBLIKE

Beyond my park gates the road runneth broad and white, shaded on the one side by hedgerows and tall trees until it reacheth a narrow bye-lane; we were hard upon this lane when out upon us rode two horsemen, such evil-looking rogues they and of aspect so desperate bold and truly villainous that instinctively I reined up my horse, and what was my amaze and disgust to see these manifest rogues were leering at and saluting myself, for one of them, a great, long-limbed fellow, pulled off weather-beaten hat to bow and flourish, saying hoarsely:

"Your humble servant, madam!"

"Ay, ay, messmate,—myself also, ma'm," quoth his companion, in voice surprisingly musical, a lean, bony fellow whose peaked, bronzed face was puckered by a livid scar that ran from sunken eye to blue, shaven chin.

Now as I sat regarding this egregious pair disgustfully, as methought they deserved, Captain Bly's sleepy voice murmured beside me:

"Madam, you behold my very good friends, Barnabas Rokeby and Ezekiel Penryn." Here, looking from the speaker to these same hangdog friends of his, I was greatly minded to turn and ride back but, as if reading my thought, he seized my horse's rein, so on I rode again, will I, nill I.

On we went by hill and dale, till we were come to open country: wide, grassy levels where a myriad tiny flowers bloomed, with beyond these on the one hand the gentle grandeur of the soft, swelling Downs and upon the other a broad vale dotted here and there with tree-girt hamlet or village, the darkling mystery of far-flung woodland and afar a vague glamour that was the sea. It was as I viewed glad-eyed this so loved and right familiar prospect that the Captain person uttered these strange, very outlandish words:

"Stand by, messmates; I snuff foul weather down wind yonder."

Thus or some such said he and I, being in some small wonder, troubling myself to glance at him, saw how he eased the pistols in the holsters of his saddle and, looking where he looked, beheld afar a group of horsemen galloping in rolling dust cloud.

As they approached, I saw these were four and could hear them laughing and shouting gaily one to another; when they were come yet nearer, I recognized them for neighbours all four,—gentlemen of my acquaintance and persons of quality, to wit: Sir Harry Wilding, Mr. Brant, Mr. Welland and Lord Holmby, and the cause of their riotous hilarity was all too manifest in their flushed faces and extravagant gestures when, beholding me, they reined up across the road, hats aflourish and voices so loud in vociferous greeting that I frowned on them each and every, and disdainful bade them go back to their wine-bibbing; whereat they but laughed the louder.

"Nay, now," cried Sir Harry. "I do protest an' we be anyways fuddled, sweet Mistress Ursula, 'twas in pledging joy and long life to thy lovely self, so soon a bride, and abounding vigour to—"

"Be silent, sir!" cried I angrily.

"Aha—sweet coyness!" laughed Lord Holmby. "Howbeit we are come to bring Geoffrey his blushing bride. And zounds, madam, I protest we find you in dev-lish odd company, let me die! Be quit of 'em and entrust thy so tempting self to us thy so devoted humble servants and very slaves to command—"

But here, and before I might retort, the Captain person spoke in voice rudely harsh and words wholly unintelligible.

"Avast!" cried he fiercely. "Belay and veer, my bully boys; veer and stand away, lest we run ye aboard."

Lord Holmby blinked, swore and reached for his sword hilt, but even then the Captain's horse moved, leapt and cannoned into Lord Holmby's sleek animal so violently that his lordship was thrown and his mount, snorting affright, galloped furiously away. The Captain's hands flashed down and up and in either fist was a levelled pistol.

"Now, my pretty lads," quoth he, fiercely jovial, "d' ye give us room or do I make ye—which?"

Sir Harry Wilding snatched out a pistol ... but ere he might discharge it, Deborah screamed and I was deafened by sudden report, and through drifting smoke cloud saw Sir Harry staring pallidly at the broken weapon in his numbed and shaking hand; and whiles I soothed my frightened horse, myself well-nigh stunned by the suddenness of it all, quoth the Captain:

"And there spoke Castor; here's Pollux shall talk e'en more to the point, if need be. Messmates—their barkers!" roared this so violent wretch, whereupon his two companions riding near snatched away the pistols of these startled gentlemen whiles my lord Holmby, getting to his legs, to scowl and dust his rumpled finery, cursed so unrestrainedly that I would have cried shame, but ere I might do so the Captain's booted foot whirled from stirrup and thrust his lordship down into the dust again.

"There's dog of a lord for ye!" he growled; "a lewd cur to yap afore lady. Bark again and I'll brain ye. Forrard's the word, messmates." So forward we rode, the gentlemen giving us way and all of them with never a word.

And after a while, finding the Captain rode beside me, I shot him a glance askance and saw he was regarding me with his odious, leering quirk.

"Well, ma'm Ursula," saith he in his sleepy voice, "how think ye o' Japhet Bly? Doth he appeal the virgin soul o' thee to the instant slavish obedience so necessary for what is to be?"

"But what should ever possibly be 'twixt myself and such as yourself?" I demanded and looked at him and through him, and drooping my lashes in contempt beyond all words, capped all this with a shudder, then glared with sudden fury to his baleful sleepy voice and throaty chuckle.

"Mighty fine, ma'm, and yet beside the mark! your ladyship's high airs and graces go by me, for I'm neither amorous, ogling fine gentleman, delicate coxcomb nor languishing beau—"

"The which is sufficiently evident!" quoth I.

"Then, ma'm, when you think on me, I—"

"Oh, sir," I retorted disdainfully, "you are presumptuous to suppose thing so impossible, for truly I do nowise trouble my thoughts with you."

"Why then, you will, ma'm; you will anon! I dare prophesy you shall come to think o' Japhet daily, hourly and by the minute. You shall watch his every look, hang upon his least word and gesture,—faith, ye shall dream of him waking and asleep."

"Ah, then now, sir, now," said I, turned on him and bitterly contemptuous, "I do think on you now and with a very perfect disgust."

"Nay," says he, shaking his detestable head, "disgust shall not serve. I must needs inspire thee with one or all o' these several passions, to wit:—ardent love, unreasoning faith or blind fear; choose thou!" Now at this I forgot rageful scorn in stark amazement for, seeing the wretch was nowise drunk, I deemed he must be mad and as I surveyed his lean, unlovely visage, his next words made me sure of this.

"For, ma'm Ursula, with your every look and gesture it becomes to me the more certain that for your own future good I must presently marry you!" Then, seeing me bereft of speech:

"Alas!" sighed he. "And I had thought to live and die a merry, care-free bachelor!" Though raging indignation had made me dumb 'twas but for a moment, and now I lashed him with every scornful epithet that leapt to my tongue (and these a-many, thank Heaven); I poured upon him a very torrent of bitter reproach and searing invective, and all with such look as should certainly have struck shame to any but this oafish wretch who, in the height of this tirade, fell chuckling so that I yearned to cuff and scratch the hateful, lean face of him; and now becoming breathless.

"Odious impertinent!" I gasped. "Vile, despicable, ill-bred wretch ... detestable monster ... rather than stoop to such infamy I—"

"Would see me dead—I know!" he nodded. "But, ma'm, am I of such abounding life and vigour I must needs live, it seems, an' live henceforth to your passionate grief, for wed you I shall—"

Here or ever he might prevent, I wheeled my eager mare and bounding from the road, set off at sudden furious gallop.

Before me the ground rose in a long ascent, a grassy slope becoming ever steeper, but my dainty mare Rosabell was fleet and took it bravely,—up and up, her sure hoofs pounding the velvet sward, her shapely body rhythmically aswing, she bore me nowise distressed until the going was easier; but then, hearing pursuit behind me, I sudden plied whip and spur so fiercely that my poor mare, all unused to such harsh treatment, snorted in painful affright, swerved violently in her stride, reeled and went down, throwing me headlong.... Then powerful arms were about me and a voice groaned:

"Now God forgive me!"

But these arms so strong were so reverent in their embrace, the voice so unexpectedly gentle, that I ventured a peep through my lashes and saw the face above me changed as his voice, indeed so transfigured that I scarce could believe it the same. And now, seeing in him the cause of my bruises (several) and reason of my downfall, I resolved he should not revive me too soon nor without sufficient pain and labour, and that his anxious dread lest he had wounded or killed me should grow to fear.

Thus when he presently set a silver flask to my lips, I shut my teeth against it, yet none the less I must needs swallow some of the fiery spirit, wherewith he deluged me so that I choked.... Yet I held my eyes resolutely shut and lay in his arm limp as poor dead thing, nor stirred even when with officious hand he must feel if my heart yet beat or no—(as indeed it did, to be sure). The which fact seemed to reassure him, for he sighed deeply and thereafter held me closer and very still, seeming to be looking down on me earnestly. Then the compelling arm lifted me higher, nearer to the face down-bent and for one long and most abominable minute (wherein I held my breath appalled) I thought he would have kissed me and braced myself to endure such shameful affliction; but my fears proved groundless (thank my stars) for he presently drew away and setting me down, waited for me to recover.

Thus after some while I sighed tremulously and opened swooning eyes to see him sitting over against me, cross-legged upon the sward, busied recharging the pistol he had fired; then glancing at me with his quirkish smile:

"Didst think I would ha' kissed thee?" he enquired.

At this I merely shivered and closed my eyes again.

But presently I heard him stir and, looking up, saw him leading back my mare, for the poor, dear creature for every affection had stayed near me and now, approaching, was nuzzling his grimly cheek, her graceful head above his shoulder.

"And now," says he, caressing my Rosabell like one that knew and loved horses, "we will proceed, ma'm, an' you be able to mount."

"I'm not!" I murmured, faint-voiced.

"Then I will lift you," says he, "for on we must."

"No need is for such haste," said I.

"Ay, but there is," he answered.

So having no mind he should touch me again, perforce I got me upon my legs and with his unasked assistance, back into the saddle.

But when I would have turned on the road, he stayed me. "Our way lieth yonder!" said he, gesturing where in the distance (though nearer and more plain from this eminence) gleamed the sea.

"But Shalmeston Manor lieth the other way!" said I, turning.

"I know it," he answered, swinging lightly astride his own horse, "but you are riding with me to watch poor Japhet pay debts long overdue."

"Never!" cried I, gathering up my reins purposefully.

"At once!" said he, seizing them also; whereupon I instantly struck at him with my whip only to have it seized, wrenched from me and tossed away.

"So now, most gentle lady, let us ride."

And thus, with his great brown fist fast upon my mare's reins, he led me whither he would.

"And what of my maid?" I demanded, raging.

"Shalt find her safe enough, I'll warrant me." After this, we rode on together side by side and never a word between us.

CHAPTER III

TELLETH HOW (AND TO MY HORROR) CERTAIN DEBTS WERE PAID

We rode by bridle paths and unfrequented ways, for he seemed to know the country hereabouts as well or better even than I; and we went at leisured, ambling pace and rode in a silence unbroken save for the jingle of bits and creak of saddle leather, since whenso he attempted speech, I stared dumbly over him, beyond him, or turned my back on the wretch; thus, instead of offering further speech, he fell a-singing of some lewd rant full of "hevings" and "Yoho-ings" with mention of dead men, murder and the like, until at last:

"Oh, be silent!" I exclaimed.

"As any stockfish, an' ye will, ma'm."

"What do you intend with me?"

"You've heard."

"Is it money you want,—a ... a ransom?"

"No, ma'm."

"What then?"

"Yourself."

"But you nothing know me."

"Better than I did and shall do e'en better anon."

"You ... you will dare abduct me?"

"Ay, ay, ma'm, abduct it is and more's the pity."

"Oh, Villainy!" raged I. "Shalt hang for this!"

"Peradventure, ma'm, tho' let's hope not, for both our sakes. Howbeit, yonder lieth Shoreham and 'tis thither we go." Now as he spoke, I spurred my poor Rosabell in wild and desperate hope of escape, but, even as the mare reared, his brutal arm had plucked me from the saddle and I, prone across his knees, was fighting him, desperate with rage and fear; and even now this merciless tyrant must leer and mock at me, for:

"Easy now!" says he. "And oh, fie, shame on you, ma'm, for to be showing thus a modest sailorman your legs ... besides, I've already remarked their shapeliness alow and aloft—"

"Beast!" I cried, striking up at his mocking face; so he dropped me.

"Madam," said he in altered voice and look so changed that I caught my breath, "some day poor Japhet will be loving you very truly and with such reverence as shall be your own astonishment."

Then, riding after my mare, he brought her back.... And presently we were going on again through these solitudes where showed no living creature saving our two selves.

The kindly sun sank low and lower and with his going my courage began to fail me and my poor heart to beat (and ever more distressfully) for shameful dread of what this coming night must bring; though minding how he had viewed me with a gentleness so unexpected, nay almost reverent, in this I found me some small comfort ... and yet, as the evening shadows lengthened and grew, so grew my doubts.

"Ma'm," said he at last and suddenly, "you sigh very prettily plaintive and oft; now is this by reason of waxing passion o' love or yearning for supper? If 'tis love," he went on, seeing I deigned him no reply, "then, ma'm, here is thy Japhet; if 'tis mere lust for meat and drink, down yonder is snug tavern where they shall be duly satisfied."

Looking whither he pointed, I saw a little valley below us where, bowered amid trees, rose the roof and chimneys of a small inn that methought very remote and desolate; and the sight of this inn, its lonely situation where a woman's screams must go all unheard, this filled me with such dreadful apprehension that I approached it with a prayer upon my tremulous lips.

As we drew nearer, my companion set fingers to mouth and whistled shrilly, whereupon and almost at once two men approached who lifted arms in cheery salutation.

So came we to this inn or rather hedge tavern, which I saw bore a sign naming it The Jolly Woodman.

"Is our bird safe, Absalom?" questioned my companion of these two men who were staring up at me.

"Ay, ay, Cap'n!" answered one, a smallish, white-headed man, who yet seemed strangely young in despite of his silvery hair.

"Why then, go fetch the gentleman's sword," quoth the Captain, "and do you come with us, Ben, to take our horses." So saying, he led the way round to the back of the inn where was a yard shut in by barns and stables.

Here we dismounted and taking my hand (will I, nill I) he led me into a fragrant barn and so brought me where, couched upon hay pile, lay a very gorgeous gentleman, though his velvets and laces showed rumpled by reason of the cords that bound him from belaced throat to silk-clad ankles, while his face, half hidden in the long curls of his great periwig, was further hidden by the dingy clout that was tied about his mouth. Now even as I gazed pitiful upon this poor, so ill-used gentleman, the Captain chuckled and using my hand to point with:

"Ma'm," says he, his wolfish mouth twisted in its odious, sneering quirk, "you behold here a very person no less, ma'm, than my lord Viscount Barrasdale,—ay, look on him, for 'tis indeed the noble gentleman would have honoured you with himself in wedlock. Observe him, lady—these speaking eyes how fierce and fiery they roll; is it for love o' thee and thy worldly goods, or for instant bloody vengeance on thy poor Japhet? Himself shall pronounce. Ben, unloose him."

With a swift dexterity, the prisoner was freed of his cruel bonds, whereupon he rose and stood rubbing and chafing at arms and wrists, a tall, comely gentleman despite his scowling look, a masterful gentleman of full though commanding presence.

"What, Geoffrey," mocked the Captain. "I do protest thou'rt grown plump as partridge, Geoff—" Uttering a snarling, inarticulate cry, very dreadfully beastlike, this dignified gentleman leapt at his grim tormentor but checked as suddenly and recoiled before the narrow, twinkling steel that threatened to impale him; and sword thus in hand, the Captain mocked him still.

"Patience, Geoffrey! Thy day was and is gone; mine is—now! Absalom Troy!"

"Ay, ay, Cap'n."

"Heave the gentleman his bodkin!" I saw the white-headed man unsheathe and toss a naked sword at the gentleman's feet who, snatching it up, stood for a dreadful moment bending the supple blade this way and that, staring on the Captain's leering visage with a strange, fixed intensity; once he seemed about to speak but, as I held my breath, he leapt instead to such sudden fury of action that I shrank in terror, my eyes upon those clinking, whirling blades in horrified expectancy.

Now fain would I have closed my eyes but the murderous dart of those twinkling points held me as it were enthralled. I heard the man Absalom Troy beside me mutter a great oath and then the Captain spoke:

"I've cheated ye of your heiress, Geoff! See, there she stands to watch me brand ye for damned villain ... so play your best, Geoffrey! Pink me an' ye can, for, by God—" The flashing swords whirled furiously; I heard the white-haired Absalom laugh thin and shrill, and then the gentleman, dropping sword, reeled back, begemmed hand to his dreadfully marred cheek that dripped blood horribly.

"Soho!" quoth the Captain, sheathing his cruel sword, "there's my mark, Geoffrey; nor shall ye rub it off, no matter how long you live to plague this poor world. How think you, ma'm?" And he turned where I stood so faint and sick that now when I would have denounced and cried my abhorrence of him, his face blurred, the ground swayed dizzily beneath my stumbling feet and, for the first time in all my life, I verily and truly swooned away.

CHAPTER IV

TELLETH HOW, BEING A WOMAN, I GREW ACQUAINT WITH FEAR BECAUSE I WAS A WOMAN

Opening my eyes, I found myself outstretched voluptuously upon a great bed and, starting up in instant horrid fear, was something reassured to see myself still fully dressed save for my hat, cloak and spurred riding boots; so down I sank again, being yet sickened by the savagery I had so lately witnessed ... those murderous swords ... that gashed and bleeding face ... the remorseless, mocking figure of this Captain Japhet Bly.

And thinking of him and of my own present helpless plight, my natural courage and resolution well-nigh failed me; for if he could so use a man, what mercy should poor defenceless woman expect of such monster (thinks I, shuddering) and hid my burning face in the pillow, my pride all forgot, my poor body trembling for shame of its all too alluring womanhood. Then my heart leapt wildly, for a hand was upon the latch and, starting to an elbow, I stared in a sick terror as the door cautiously opened.

"Who ... who is it?" I gasped.

"Naught save me, ma'm!" answered a female voice, and I sank back in very ecstasy of relief as into the room came a woman whose kindly, beaming face showed gentle as her voice, so that crying I know not what, I reached out my hands to her and next moment was laughing and weeping in the shelter of her arms.

But presently, growing somewhat comforted, I looked up into her eyes and reading there naught but goodness and a sweet sincerity, I poured out the tale of my woes and haunting fears, beseeching her aid so humbly, yet with such passion, that she came near crying too for very sympathy.

"Oh, but ma'm," she murmured, "oh, my dearie, ye dunnot understand and I durst not tell ee—"

"Let me go," I whispered; "help me to escape ... give me a chance to steal away. Be the gentle, kind creature you seem and help me—"

"Oh, but ma'm, 'twould never serve ... if ye but knew—"

"Money!" said I.... "My purse—here, take it! And you shall have more ... much more, so much as you will—"

"Hush now, hush thee!" she sighed, her kindly face very troublous. "I may not ... 'twould be in vain; he would take thee again and perchance ... bloodshed ... prison."

"No matter, I'll risk my very life to win free of him," I pleaded. "Where is he now?"

"Busied a-doctoring yon poor gentleman's face, a-binding and a-plastering."

"But 'twas his own brutal hand that wrought the harm,—"

"And 'tis his own two hands that be now a-mending of it.... But, ma'm, Mistress Ursula, ah, my lady, y' do ha' forgot me sure, and no wonder. But I be Mercy Dale, as was once Mercy Brent, and you be that same little lady Ursula growed up, as used to visit the Great House at East Bourne, when I was second nursemaid. You'll not mind me, but you can't ha' forgot the little Earl ... my lord Aldbourne, as was your playfellow. You'll mind Charles, the little Earl, Mistress Ursula?"

"Yes, yes," I answered, "the little gentle boy that died—such gallant little fellow—"

"Died?" says Mrs. Mercy, opening her large soft eyes at me, "Died—ay, for sure! But how knew ye this?"

"I heard some such tale.... But oh, Mercy, an' you have any o' the old love for poor me, be bold to help me now for—" I caught my breath and we started from each other's arms, as a fist hammered on the door and a harsh voice growled:

"Mrs. Mercy, ma'm, you an' lady below: Cap'n orders!"

"Yes, sir," answered Mercy, rising nimbly and smoothing her neat gown. "Come you, my lady—'tis supper, tho' early—"

"No!" said I, clenching my hands and mighty resolute, "I'll not stir ... his detested face ... no, I'll bide here an' I must."

"Nay, but my dearie, come your ways now wi' me—"

"No—no!" cried I, again leaping from the bed. "I have no hunger and ... I do so loathe the mere sight of him I could not eat—"

"Oh, but madam, he ... there be naught o' harm shall touch ee. So come now, ma'm, come wi' me, lest he grow angered like and come after ee to take and make ee." Now at this, glancing from Mercy's pleading face to the door and then askance at the great bed, I shivered and, giving her my unwilling hand, suffered myself to be led forth and down a pair of stairs to a certain door, but here I stayed her to whisper.

"Who ... who was it carried me up to bed?"

"Why, ma'm," she whispered back, "who but himself, the ... the Captain." Then, setting my teeth, I threw open the door and stepped into a cosy chamber, its lattices open to the sunset glow and empty save for myself; moreover I saw the table was laid for but one.

"Thank God!" quoth I fervently.

"Eh,—what now, my dear lady?"

"I feared the infliction of the Captain's presence."

"Nay, ma'm, alack, I am prevented," murmured his detested, sleepy voice and in at the window came the odious head of him. "You behold me, ma'm humbly pleading you'll excuse my presence. Mrs. Mercy," says he, finding me dumb, "you may serve her most gracious ladyship and feed her well for what is to be."

"Yes, sir!" murmured the dame, with bobbing curtesy; then I was alone and this brutish Captain leaning in at the casement.

"Ma'm," says he, so soon as the door was shut, "your shy timidity of look and fear-averted eyes do gratify me extremely, for by these same I judge your prideful spirit beginneth to bow, thy heart to leap, thy flesh to chill, for fear o' this poor Japhet ... and all so very soon!"

Now at this I turned on him but, mindful of that room above stairs, I checked the fiercely disdainful retort upon my lips and sinking wearily upon the nearest chair, turned my back on him. So for a while was a silence, wherein he seemed distractingly and utterly still, even as I; then he chuckled and I heard his spurs go a-jingling off across the yard. So came I to the lattice to look with yearning eyes towards those far green slopes beyond which lay freedom, and for a moment had some wild thought of flight till, chancing to espy the man Absalom watching me, silvery head acock, I sighed dismally and turned from the window to see the door open and there, to my joyous wonderment, my own devoted Deborah.

"Oh, madam," cried she, and then we were in each other's arms. "Art safe, ma'm?" she questioned in her breathless fashion. "Art safe ... unharmed ... no wise touched ... this naughty villain...."

"All is well—so far, thank kind Heaven. But how came you here, my Deb ... to my need, how?"

"Oh, ma'm ... my lady, 'twas him, this des'prate fightsome Captain, himself bade me to thee, he did. But oh, alack for Gregory!"

"Ah, what ... what hath he done to poor Gregory?"

"Oh, shameous, ma'm! They ha' so plied him atwixt 'em that he lieth sadly drunk and snoring. But oh, Mistress Ursula, what shall befall us this night—you so beauteous and me so—so timid o' mankind and this place full o' men ... clawsome tigers and ravensome wolves and us like two poor frightened lambs.... Oh, Mistress Ursula, what ... what must us do?"

"Keep together," I answered calmly as I might. "We must keep ever close, Deborah, and seem unafraid—and whatsoever befalls, no matter how, no matter where, you lie with me, this night."

"Ay, I will, ma'm, I will! I'll cling to thee so close wild tigers shall not drag thee from me whiles I live,—no, nor any

two-legged tiger either."



CHAPTER V

TELLETH HOW AND WHERE I SPENT THIS FIRST SO DREADFUL NIGHT

Evening had fallen to glimmering dusk and we were sitting close together, Deborah and I, two poor souls very woeful and forlorn, though Deborah was still at her supper (by my leave) munching and sipping, sipping and munching, till I could have boxed her ears, to see her thus cowishly resigned.

"If ye would but peck a bit, ma'm," sighed she, viewing me above laden fork, "a morsel now—"

"Woman," said I, shuddering, "a crumb would choke me."

"Nay, come now, my dearie ma'm, a snippet o' the beef, so tender and heartsome—"

"You should know!" I retorted bitterly.

"Ay, I do so, ma'm," she nodded; then, filling her mouth she munched again until I leapt to my feet in such strange frenzy as surprised myself and so startled Deborah that the poor thing dropped her fork and stared up at me with great fearful eyes.

"Lud, ma'm, what—what now?" she faltered.

"You ... me ... everything!" cried I. "How can you eat—how dare you eat, and with death and worse all about us? Yet you so munch and munch and my poor sick heart ready to burst."

"I ... I was so hungry, ma'm. And there be naught to hearten one like good food and Mis' Ursula, dearie, things might be worse; us might be poor corpses, or alive and shameous ravaged and abused—"

"'Tis an evil but deferred, mayhap," said I, and so miserably that up she jumped (the dear one) to clasp and comfort me.

"There, there! my dearie," she murmured, patting me as I had been timorous child. "I know 'tis wild and violent man and you no more than poor tremblesome frightened maid, but—"

"Frighted—I?" cried I fiercely, whisking myself from her clinging arms. "'Tis pure horror sets me a-trembling—loathly horror of a beast, not fear of man; I fear none o' the odious sex and least of all this man ... except he catch me alone.... This vile wretch—oh, damn him!" cried I wildly. "How dare he thus use me—od rot him! Oh, but he shall answer for this yet, tho' I die for it—he shall suffer plague and the devil seize him—"

"Fie, ma'm, fie!" chuckled a voice at the window and, dim seen against the dusk, the Captain's head thrust in at us. "Such tripping facility o' phrase! I protest you can so outcurse and swear poor sailorman that I blush for myself and envy you —"

"Captain Bly," said I, making the most of my inches, "an' you must creep and listen, stretch wide your detestable ears and hear me. That whatsoever befalls me and mine at your wicked hands, I swear to God that some day, somehow, for that you shall pay and bitterly suffer—"

"Why, ma'm," says he with grim laugh, "Japhet hath known so much o' suffering,—ay, and such suffering, that he and it shall meet like old messmates."

"Yet look to it, sir," I continued; "dare so much as lay your wicked hands on me, and, so soon as chance serve, I vow to kill you." Something in my passionate utterance must have convinced him, for 'stead of throaty chuckle I heard him draw his breath sharply and, finding him silent, I said in the same even tone:

"You believe me, sir?"

"Faith," he answered. "I believe ye might try."

"Never doubt it!" I nodded. "Give me knife or pistol and I will prove my words."

"Why, so you shall," he answered, nodding back at me; "yet not now, for now we ride; so make you ready."

"How an' I refuse?"

"You shall be bound and gagged and thrown across horse—mighty undignified." With which he turned and jingled away and presently horses were stamping in the yard.

And so, because I needs must, I beckoned Deborah to aid me with my cloak; then espying among the litter of the supper table a knife that showed strong and with a point, I caught it up and hid it 'neath my cloak whiles Deborah was setting on her own. Then in came Mercy, bearing candles, and putting them down stood wringing her hands and looking furtive towards the lattice; wherefore, deeming she yet had a mind to aid me an' she dared, I spoke her, whispering:

"Mrs. Mercy, in my purse be fifteen guineas—take them oh, take them and steal me a pistol—" But at the word she recoiled as I had struck her, then leaning near,

"Ah, no—no!" says she in strange, gasping voice. "'Twere wickedness, for he ... he is not as he seems ... he is noble gentleman ... hath suffered much wrong ... bitter griefs ... ha' no fear, only be you patient a little while—" The pleading voice ended in choking gasp as in upon us strode the Captain himself.

For a moment he scowled from the woman to me and back again then, mutely beckoning us forth, I swept by him and so out into the dim yard, where men muttered together and horses stamped impatiently.

And presently, being mounted, we rode away from this inn of The Jolly Woodman at leisured ambling pace (the horses plodding silent on the velvet turf) through a vague countryside, tho' the sky was spangled with stars and the glamour of a rising moon. They had mounted Deborah also and she, not so used to the saddle as I, moaned plaintively ever and anon. How far we rode thus or how long I know not, but up came the gentle moon at last and very tenderly familiar she seemed.

Now, looking up at these wondrous lights twinkling from the floor of heaven, I breathed a wordless prayer to that Great Creator of it all, yea, of all that ever was or is or is yet to be, calling on Him now in my extremity like woeful child to loving Father, since He that is so mighty to shape this infinite universe is so tender to mark the fall of a sparrow. Then I (that had been wont to pray but by rote all heedlessly hitherto) now prayed with all my soul for strength and courage and patience; that God would keep me alive and undefiled or teach me how worthily to die. And presently my heart swelled with a new courage, my dreadful apprehensions were all smoothed away, so that I now went with a serene mind and my eyes uplift to heaven in very ecstasy of gratitude, for it seemed God had verily heard my prayer.

Slowly the moon rose, very large and ever brighter, until she swam in majesty like the pale queen that she is; and looking on her so familiar gentle face she seemed, as it were, some kind friend watching over me, though her tender radiance made our captors show the more villainous than ever,—six of them I counted riding three and three before us and behind; and they talked but rarely and then in hoarse mutterings, going thus with little noise and by desolate ways like the furtive wretches and gallow birds they were. From the evil menace of them I lifted my gaze again up to the moon's placid beauty and had gone thus some while when the three who rode immediately before me began to talk and I saw they were Ezekiel Penryn, Barnabas Rokeby and the Captain.

"So," says Rokeby, "thy cake's dough, eh, Japhet; art cheated o' thy dear vengeance, lad!"

"Hosanna!" exclaimed Penryn. "'Vengeance is Mine, saith the Lord!'"

"Ay, but Zeke, herein I hold myself the Lord's anointed," says Captain Bly (and very blasphemous, methought). "'An eye for an eye,' reverend sir."

"Why, there's reason in that, look you!" quoth Penryn unctuously. "'A tooth for a tooth'; 'tis gospel. Then you'll after your man, eh, Japhet?"

"Across the world, Zeke."

"And 'tis mighty well!" said Rokeby. "Here's no place, no rest for such outcast dogs as we; 'tis rope or worse an' we be recognized—"

"Recognized, Barnabas?" quoth Penryn, with cackle of mirthless laughter. "You—wi' that grim figurehead and greying hair! There be nary one shall recognize such bloody cut-throat for what you was when you rode out wi' us for the holy

Protestant cause, God prosper it! Would your own mother know ye? Curse me—no!"

"She's dead!" growled Barnabas. "I was able to learn thus much."

"And as for me," continued Penryn, his sweet voice very clear above the creak of saddle leather, "would any o' the multitudes that thronged to hear me preach, and stood whiles I lifted their souls to the very footstool o' God, know me in this ruin that I now am? Damme, not one!"

"Twelve years!" said the Captain, turning to stare up at the moon now high risen upon our left. "Twelve years!"

"Call 'em twenty!" growled Barnabas. "Didst try to find thy wife and family, Zeke?"

"No, messmate, no! The children will be grown by now ... well, let 'em think me dead ... as I should be, but for you and Japhet, with a curse!"

"Hast a wife too, Barnabas, I think?" questioned the Captain.

"I had, comrade, but she's wed again."

"Art sure, man?" says the Captain, laying hand on the speaker's broad shoulder.

"Beyond doubt, comrade ... well, why not? We ha' come back out of hell to find we are dead and forgot—eh, Japhet?"

"Ay," he nodded; "we be dead men all."

"Which, being dead, yet speak," quoth Penryn, with another cackle of laughter. "Ay, and with hands, praise Jehovah, that yet can fight! Alleluia! So give me bloody battle—eh, Barnaby?"

"Ay, Zeke.... And what says you, Japhet man?"

"That having lost my all, I'll take all that I may."

"Ay, and what o' this lady, ha? You, Japhet, that's had no truck wi' women since that Spanish donna we took at Margarita. Come, what o' this lass? She'll prove a handful, by her looks, I'll warrant—"

"And women aboardship mean strife," quoth Penryn, "bloodshed, Japhet, and all the sins in the calendar; so, comrade, what's your mind?"

But now when I hearkened, my every sense on the alert, the Captain's answer was lost in sound of clattering hoofs as, leaving the grassy track, we came out upon a hard road. Now went I something dismayed at their mention of a ship and greatly mystified by this talk of dead men. But my anxious speculations were suddenly dispelled as, rounding a shoulder of the Down we had been traversing, I saw below us what seemed a farmhouse with barns and ricks and beyond, the sea, upon whose restless, gleaming waters rode a great black ship, her lofty masts soaring high against the moon 'mid an infinity of ropes and rigging.

Now this sight instantly renewed all my terrors and knowing in my poor heart that this same ship was to be my prison and perchance the shameful end of me,—this filled me with such wild despair that, resolved to die in my dear England if needs must, I kicked foot from stirrup and thus, with some desperate hope of escape one way or other, leapt from the saddle.... I heard Deborah scream, had a vision of rearing horses, then all breath and life itself seemed smitten out of me.

CHAPTER VI

HOW WE CAME ABOARDSHIP

Back from a blessed unconsciousness came I, little by little, to see painted, carven beams above me with a great gilded lamp that swung gently to and fro; and I watched this dreamily awhile till I became more and more aware how my head throbbed and of a painful smarting in my leg; and then 'twixt me and the lamp came Deborah's down-bent, anxious face.

"Oh, my dearie lamb!" sighed she, cool hand upon my aching brow. "Thank Heaven you'm your own precious self again."

"Deborah," said I, glancing about, "are we ... where are we?"

"Safe in this gurt ship, ma'm."

"Safe?" cried I bitterly.

"Ay, dearie, though you was like poor dead thing and oh, a-bleeding right horrorsome, poor bird."

"Why, how was this; what happened?"

"You fell, dearie ma'm."

"No, Deborah, I jumped."

"Oh, lud 'a' mercy and all they rampageous horses! You might ha' been killed!"

"And why not?" sighed I wearily. "But why did I bleed and what aileth my leg?"

"Ah, your pretty leg, ma'm!" cried Deborah, hands clasped and eyes uprolling. "Your dear, beauteous leg all cut and gory! Your new petticoat with the point lace all blood! But your sweet, lovesome leg—look at it!" And lifting my garments, she showed me my leg all bare and a bandage swathed just above the knee.... Now, seeing how deftly this bandage was set, I sat upright very suddenly, staring down at it in an evergrowing perturbation.

"Deborah," said I at last, my wide gaze still on this, "was it you ... set this bandage?"

"Who else, ma'm?"

"Deborah," said I, looking at her now, "you could never have set bandage so! You are telling me wicked lie!"

"Ay, I am, dearie," sighed she, "though meaning no wickedness. And I vow, ma'm, he handled you as your pretty leg was made o' glass,—so gentle! Ay, so tender as you was a flower—"

"He?" I gasped. "He? You mean—"

"Ay, I do, Mis' Ursula dearie; him, the Captain—"

For a moment I could but stare at her and, becoming conscious of my naked leg, hid it passionately; then indeed I found words aplenty, nor paused for breath until she began to sob and splash great tears and I, 'twixt anger and shame, nigh sobbing too.

"Oh, Deborah," gasped I, "how could you suffer it ... how could you, how dared you suffer this vile man to ... such odious freedoms—"

"La, ma'm, I swear to holy heavens 'twas no such thing—"

"Yet let the monster touch me—"

"But oh, ma'm, you seemed so dead-like and me so distraught-like and him so quick-like that your petticoats was up and your stocking was down ere a body might wink. And then—Lord bless you, ma'm, your pretty leg might ha' been a man's leg or a horse's leg, for aught he seemed to mind, or leg o' chair or table. And oh, 'tis wrong, Mistress Ursula, ma'm, 'tis shameous cruel in you to think your Deborah would allow o' such except across my dying body ... me as hath loved and

cared for ee all these years and now to be suspicioned! Oh, Mistress Ursula, that you could think such shame o' me!" So saying, this dear, devoted creature flung herself on her knees beside me in such passionate grief that I could but kiss and comfort her.

"But tell me, Deborah," said I, when she had suffered me to dry her tears, "who stabbed me? Was it—the Captain?"

"Lord, no, ma'm—no!" she exclaimed. "However could ee think it? 'Twas yourself, ma'm; leastways the knife as you took and hid in pocket o' your cloak cut you, it did, when you jumped—"

"Where is the knife?"

"On the table yonder, ma'm."

"Bring it to me." With this knife clutched in hand, I sat up, despite Deborah's protests, to see I had been lying on a broad-cushioned settee or locker that extended along two sides of a chamber or rather cabin, nobly furnished and panelled with strange, pretty woods, the great beams above my head brave with paint and gilding and with goodly carpets underfoot, all of the which finery of itself waked in me a new dread.

"Oh, 'tis fine grand ship, ma'm!" said Deborah.

"Indeed, my poor innocent, too grand!" said I, shivering. "'Tis my very belief this is no better than pirate ship."

"Oooh!" exclaimed Deborah, clasping her hands, tho' with such look as perfectly surprised me.

"How?" cried I. "D'ye not see what this means? This wicked ship and us on't, beset by desperate, lawless men, murdering villains ... sailing us away heaven knoweth where."

"'Tis turble, ma'm, for indeed the ship do shew full o' men, though to be sure there's none of 'em nowise harmed us yet, and there be one, a tall man wi' gold rings in's ears, as lifted me into the boat so kind and gentle he might ha' been a body's own mother—"

"Gracious heaven above!" said I. "Are ye so brazen bold to have no fear? My poor silly wretch, we may be beaten ... ravished and walking planks very soon—ay, and eaten by sharks ... and you can do no more than clasp your foolish hands and cry Ooh!"

"Nay, but Mis' Ursula, what should a poor body do?"

"Do?" quoth I, flashing scornful eyes at her. "You should be nigh dead with horror and shrinking shame."

"Deed, my dearie, ma'm, I do be trembling all over me now."

"Oh, be silent!" said I.

"Yes, m' lady—"

"Nay, tell me, is my leg much wounded?"

"No, ma'm, glory be! 'Tis scarce more than scratch, though you bled vastly—proud blood, he named it."

"Never mention the wretch!"

"Very well, ma'm. Shall I put you to bed?"

"No! Besides, I see no beds."

"There be a little room behind yon door wi' two, ma'm, though he named 'em bunks!"

"A detestable word! And I'll none of them, girl. I'll lie here on the settee and watch the night out."

"Nay, but my lady, at least you'll be undressed?"

"Horrors, no! I'd lie in full armour an' I might."

"Why then, let me loose and make you easy."

"Not a string, woman!"

"Well, oh, my dearie, won't you please to eat somewhat? Ah, prithee peck a bit if 'tis no more than wing o' chicken—"

"No, no!" cried I, shuddering. "The poor outraged soul of me mocks at such idea, for how should any woman of a delicate sensibility think of gross food ... besides, I see no chicken."

"Oh, but you ate naught at the inn and you must take somewhat, indeed."

"Ay, true," sighed I (for I must here confess, since 'tis writ in my diary, I was well-nigh famished), "being but human I must needs eat lest all strength and courage fail me.... Bring me your chicken wing." Thus presently, and despite our woeful plight, I supped very well, though I would touch no drop of wine, contenting myself with water.

"And now, ma'm, pray come thy ways to bed; there be clean sheets and—"

"No! First aid me into my stocking and shoe."

"Nay, they'm all gory, ma'm—"

"Then get me others."

No sooner was I reshod than:

"Deborah," says I, taking up the knife, "go you and bid Captain Bly to me."

"The Captain—oh, my loveliness, whyever for—?"

"To show the monster I nothing fear him—"

"Oh, ma'm, but you do; you'm all ashiver wi' fright."

"To be sure I am, fool wench, and so 'tis I'll speak the wretch and show myself bold and prepared for him."

"Wi' ... that knife, my dearie lamb?"

"Ay, indeed,—and a resolute spirit. Go you and bid him hither and instantly." So away went Deborah, mighty unwilling, and was presently back to say he was busied but would come anon. So I must needs wait the wretch and in no little trepidation.

But when at last he entered, he found me standing to receive him and sufficiently dignified I hope; though:

"Madam," says he with fulsome bow, "if you have sent for me to express your gratitude for the small service I was enabled—"

"Gratitude, sir!" I repeated bitterly. "Service indeed—"

"In the matter of your scratched limb, madam."

"Be dumb, sir! I have sent for you to demand that you turn back this ship and instantly restore me to ... to my friends."

"And your woman, gracious lady?"

"And my woman, of course."

"Alack now!" he sighed. "I fear this is out o' the question."

"Beware, Captain, I am no poor country lass to be thus brutally abducted with impunity."

"True!" he nodded. "You are lady of vasty possessions; also you have red hair. But then, I am a man of scant possessions and very desperate fortune—"

"And shall answer for this outrage, sir, so sure as there is law in England."

"But then, England is fading on our lee, ma'm,—the broad seas lie before us."

"And what of myself?" cried I. "What is your purpose with me? What shame, what misery, doth your brutality purpose for me?"

"And your woman, madam?"

"What vileness do you intend us?" I demanded.

"Am I permitted to be seated, madam?"

"You may sit—over there, sir."

"Gladly, madam," he answered, taking the distant chair I indicated and crossing his legs, "for I can show you how to put the best face upon the matter and find in apparent misfortune a blessing—"

"You have abducted me by base, impudent slight—"

"Will you snuff, madam? No? Very well, it is agreed you are certainly abducted. But I have carried you away from the following evils, greater or less, to wit—a bibulous uncle, a shallow-pated aunt, divers sighful swains, a rascal that would ha' wed you for your aforesaid possessions and a life of useless, pampered ease; from all this I ha' brought you to something better—"

"Better?" cried I, bitterly scornful.

"Infinitely better!" he nodded. "I have placed you in situation shall evoke in you all that is worst or best."

"So, sir," quoth I, supremely disdainful, "you will dare to play Providence to me ... you!"

"Ma'm, indeed I am your Providence—"

"You!" I cried again, hot with such passionate scorn that I leapt afoot, unmindful of my hurt, "you that should hang for curst rogue—ay, and shall yet—"

"Out with it, ma'm!" quoth he. "Mindful of your limber-tongued uncle, curse and damn me till you're breathless! How, are ye dumb? Then hearkee! I ha' brought you to sea, my fine lady, for divers reasons, and one of 'em this; to show you that you, in your proud selfishness, know so little o' life, how desperate real life is. You shall learn, perchance, to outface horror of wind and raging seas; you shall behold how poor sailormen live, ay and die too, mayhap! 'Tis like you shall grow acquaint with dangers and, seeing pain o' wounds, you shall forget this mighty universe circles but about your puny self and come to know there be something better things than pretty-turned speech, gallantry o' bows and such fripperies. Thus and so experience shall learn you to be a woman or, 'pon my soul, ma'm Ursula, though you be my wife I'll none o' you."

"Abhorred wretch—vile man!" cried I, almost beside myself with fury. "I'll die first! So do as you will but I fear neither you nor any of your villainous company, these base rogues that do your bidding—"

"Hold there!" he exclaimed, angry in his turn at last. "You ha' seen but six of us and these friends and comrades endeared to me by bitter adversity, and some of them, moreover, of prouder birth than your prideful self, madam—"

"Rogues and villains all!" cried I. "Ay, and villainous as their looks!"

"Their looks?" he repeated bitterly. "Ay, and small wonder, for, most dainty ma'm, these be men, like those you may read of in the Scriptures, that have come out of great tribulation; they have endured sickness, hunger and the agony of thirst. They have known torment and shame o' the lash. They have slaved 'neath pitiless sun till they swooned in their fetters. Yet the blood and sweat of their agony knit them in a comradeship greater than love of brother or woman, with a faith in each other that made them able to endure; thus, though their bodies languished, their spirit never quailed. So they endured, cheering each other with unuttered word or stolen look, biding their time patiently until one day,—" here he laughed grimly and tossed wide his arms in strange wild gesture,—"they smote their smiters and won free ... aha, to freedom, some few of them, and of these are the six you saw. And as to their looks, ma'm, and most gracious lady,—well, a man may not come forth of hell and naught to show for it. So, an' my comrades' grim aspects displease your

finical taste, 'tis no matter, for in this world of action and vital reality you, and your like, count less than nothing. And now, ma'm, be so good to get you to bed."

I merely looked at him; whereupon he continued:

"Your berths are aft, yonder; they were Barnaby's and mine."

At this, very naturally, I shuddered violently.

"How, ma'm," he questioned, eyeing me askance, "won't you to bed, then?"

"No!" I answered, mighty resolute. "I will not!"

"Why then," said he, yawning behind long finger, "I will!" And to my no small dismay, the man, heeding me no whit, pulled off his coat, unbelted his sword and removed his wig, which last he tied tenderly on the table; and now, knowing not where to look, I glanced at Deborah, to see her all eyes and her rosy lips gaping to pink and silent O. And then, before I could find word,

"Mrs. Deborah," says he, unbuttoning his waistcoat, "since your lady is minded to watch over my balmy slumber, bide you too, lest she be tempted to tickle my defenceless ribs with her knife."

"Nay, sir," says she to him, choking back a giggle, "Oh, ma'm," quoth she, sighing gustily at me.

"Deborah, you may go to bed," said I, seating myself, serenely resolute, "I shall watch out this hateful night."

"Nay, my dearie," she wailed but, meeting my look, moaned and departed.

"Madam," said he, taking off the buckled shoes he now wore, "pray do not trouble to douse the light, I've learned the trick o' sleeping at any time." Having said which, he yawned, stretched himself on the cushioned settee opposite, buried his grizzled head in the pillow and seemed almost instantly to fall asleep.

Now sitting thus miserably wakeful and naught to hear save the never-ending rhythmic creak of the great ship's timbers, the bubbling hiss of the seas and the faint drone of the wind, and naught to look at save this sleeping wretch that was the wicked cause of my present woeful plight, I suffered myself to glance at him and thus looking, clenched my hands passionately on the knife in my lap, bethinking me how many a woman bolder than I might indeed have used it, maugre the consequence. And gazing on him thus (tingling with abhorrence from the very roots of my hair to the tips of my toes) I began to notice that despite silvered hair his lean face, serene in slumber, showed younger than I'd deemed; and that amid his short, thick hair (that methought might have curled) ran a great scar that must once have been such dreadful hurt I marvelled it had not killed him; also above his slim, sinewy hand that drooped, just now, so weak, and helpless, showed yet another scar, a livid mark that ran all jagged about his tanned wrist. This, together with his grizzled hair and his grim haggardness of look, put me in mind how he had spoken of coming out of great tribulation, so that for a moment I could have almost pitied him, till came the thought that these sufferings he had endured were (almost certainly) the just recompense for his own evil doing. And now, scorning to pity such base fellow, I began to cast about in my mind how I might make him suffer and bitterly rue his outrageous dealing with my poor self. Here once again I came very near despair, since every creak of this great hateful vessel was bearing me farther from my loved England and the more surely into his power. I bethought me also how he had threatened me with the terrors of storm, with sight of blood and death ... I recalled, moreover, how he had vaunted himself my Providence.... Here, glancing at the gleaming knife in my lap and from this to my bosom, I yearned to put his cruel steel to dreadful use but, knowing I could not, began to weep instead, giving full vent to my grief though very silently; and yet he heard for, sighing peevishly and without so much as troubling to open his hateful eyes:

"Ma'm," quoth he, mumbling, "your selfish grief disturbs my repose, so an' you must sob, sob you some other where."

How whiles I crouched thus, shamed by my tears (or rather that this odious man should be 'ware of them), bitterly humiliated and angered beyond all speech, came Deborah, peeping in at me like the faithful soul she is, and now, quick to read my mute appeal, ran to clasp me in comforting arms, would have led me out of his sight; but for very pride's sake, I stayed her.

"At least, sir," said I, with as much dignity as I might, "at the least, tell me whither you carry me?"

"Not I, ma'm," he answered ungraciously and mumbling in his pillow; "suffice it that yourself and myself upon wide ocean are being wafted by winds o' fortune to such fortune, good or ill, as Fortune shall decree. Now peace, ma'm, away nor cheat a weary mariner of his sleep."

So with Deborah's arms about me, I went forth of this so detested presence into a little dim place where were two beds, upon the nearest of which I sank forthwith and, refusing to be undressed, after some while wept myself miserably to sleep.



CHAPTER VII

TELLETH HOW I PLOTTED

I awoke, and very early, to bright sunshine and a piping wind, and not troubling to waken Deborah, bathed and smoothed out my clothes as well as I might (and my wound of small account). I took my hooded cloak and, leaving Deborah still deep in slumber, stole up on deck, fired by such bold and desperate purpose as now (in the light of after events) doth make me tremble to think upon; and what this purpose was, you shall presently understand.

Reaching the deck then, I breathed in very rapture of a soft, sweet, buffeting wind that thrilled me with new vigour of life, a joyous wind that drove the great ship foaming through a sea all asparkle in the young sun's level beams and filled the white sails towering in a maze of ropes and rigging to a blue heaven. From this lofty deck I could look down on the shape and splendour of the ship, brave with carving, paint and gilding, though marred and blackened here and there by marks of shot and flame. I was viewing these ominous signs of past violence somewhat aghast (for I have ever loved the sea and ships), when up carven ladder from the deck below came a gentleman very splendid in velvet, lace, and embroidery, a young man and handsome, though something too dark for an Englishman, I thought. Perceiving me, he stopped like one amazed, then took off his hat and bowed so humbly graceful that the feather of his beaver swept the deck.

"*Donna mia*," said he in soft musical voice, "you show fair as the morning. Suffer that I present myself. I am Don Luiz da Ramirez, most devotedly at your service."

"Then, Don Luiz," said I, coming to the point at once, "serve me now! If you be man of your word and gentleman of honour, lend me your help 'gainst a villain." At this, his eyes opened suddenly wide (and no wonder); then, stepping near, he spoke, almost whispering.

"Tell me your will, Signorita."

"Turn this ship about and set me safe again in England."

"*Madre de dios!*" he murmured, falling back a step. "But the so condemned Japhet ... our Captain, how of him?"

"He is but a man," said I. "And if you be the valiant gentleman you seem, you will surely win or force him to sail me back to England."

"Why, this were mutiny, Signorita!" he murmured, with flash of white teeth. "And for mutiny is death ... and yet! Ha now, an' I should adventure my so precious life to your purpose, how then?"

"You would have my ... my undying gratitude," I answered, faltering at something in his look.

"And ... what more?" he murmured, coming so near that I gave back in my turn.

"Money," said I. "All you can ask, though it be—"

"Hist!" he whispered, finger on lip ... "You shall hear from me ... the black fellow Tom!" So saying, he saluted me something hastily and stepped, light and swift, across the broad deck as yet another man appeared, an old man this, yet very upright; a mild-faced, gentle-eyed ancient, whose square, rosy face, framed in flowing white hair, beamed on me in such kindly fashion that my poor, lonely heart went out to him.

"Lady," said he, "you be early abroad."

"Indeed, sir," says I, clasping my hands, "I could not sleep—"

"Daughter," said he, bowing his reverend head, "I greet thee in the Lord. A glad, sweet morning, child, a very morning o' God, may God bless it to thee." Moved by this gentle voice and so kindly aspect, my eyes filled with smarting tears and I reached him my two hands, to have them caught in such vital clasp so strong and comforting that I bowed my head upon his breast as any daughter might have done.

"Oh, sir," said I, "be verily my friend, for no poor soul ever needed one more than poor me."

"That will I!" says he in hearty voice and, drawing my hand within his arm, he began to walk me slowly to and fro.

"Oh, 'tis a sweet ship this *Deliverance*, child!" said he. "See how nobly she meets and rides the seas, like any duck,—and three and thirty guns. And as to weatherly, ha—going roomer or on a bowline, she handles sweet as managed bloodhorse. Though it be a vain thing to take joy in the legs of a man, any sailorman should take joy in such ship as our 'Avenging Deliverer.' Would God all her crew were worthy of her, for though there be among us many o' the Elect, there be others, daughter—others, alas."

"What others, sir?"

"Heathens, child, black and yellow. Limbs o' Satan should be lopped off. Papistical idolators should be rooted out."

"And what of your Captain Bly?"

"Why faith now, 'tis a child o' grief, a lad o' wrongs, yet a stout lad and notable seaman and navigator, and what's more, 'tis a right Puritan lad o' late, even as I that was one o' Noll Cromwell's Ironsides,—'tis marvellous dispraiser of women, this same Japhet."

"Yet there was the Spanish donna at La Margarita!" said I.

"Ay, and dark, sorry business was yon! Though how you should know—"

"I heard speak of it on the road. And pray, what of Don Luiz da Ramirez?"

"A very son o' Belial! A man o' lies and blood, to be rooted out, child! Yet content ye, for by the Lord's grace, thou shalt see me slit his treacherous weasand anon." Thus speaking, he slapped hand to the long sword on his hip that I had thought so out of keeping with his white hair. "Nay, blench not from me, maiden," quoth he; "evil must be driven hence though it be by the sword. Now speak me o' thyself—nay, first know me for Lovepeace Farrance the gunner, once cornet of Oliver's horse, and one that helped to slay a wicked king. But there came a wickeder that tore poor Noll from's grave, hanged him on gibbet and buried his poor bones shamefully. My comrades they hanged, me they sold into slavery; howbeit, I live yet, by the Lord's grace. Now of thyself, child."

So I told him briefly all that had befallen and of my dread of the future. To all of the which he hearkened in a grim silence and no word until I had done, then:

"So this was the way on't!" quoth he, shaking his head in troubled fashion. "And yet—God knoweth this ship is no place for woman."

"Then, oh, Master Farrance," said I, clasping my hands in manner humbly pitiful, "good Master Farrance, help me to win free of it, for it is a wicked ship and I—"

"Wicked?" says he, opening his mild eyes at me. "Why, no—"

"Is it not a pirate ship—?"

"Why, some do so name us, for we do spoil the Amalekites as well as smite 'em, take from the ungodly what we may, yet ... a pirate? No, no."

"Then what *is* this ship and pray, sir, where is it taking me?"

"Why, as to that, child,—ha, there cometh Master Penryn that is man o' the Lord having the Word, and was notable preacher once—a holy man. Ask him; he shall answer thee roundly, I'll warrant! What Ezekiel—ho, Zeke!" cried he in roaring voice. "Aft here, Zeke!"

Whereupon Master Penryn, this sweet-voiced, bony man (though now I scarce knew him for he wore a noble, fullbottomed peruke; indeed, a very precisely neat gentleman he showed these days), climbed the ladder very nimbly and taking off his hat to me:

"So hast found the damsel, Brother," said he, "this white ewe lamb that young Japhet hath reft hither so urgently." Now, quick to sense his commiseration for me, I caught his bony hand, bowing my head over it.

"Sir," said I, in weeping tone, "pity me! If, as Master Lovepeace saith, you are indeed man of God, pray for me, protect me from wrong, save me from the evil of your Captain Japhet. Oh, Master Penryn, be my good friend."

"Mistress Revell," saith he, touching my bowed head very gently, "never doubt it."

"May I pray you call me Ursula."

"Then Ursula, the Lord is as near thee aboard this ship as ever He was, nay perchance even nearer."

"But, oh, sir is not this wicked pirate ship?"

"Nay, hearkee—this is ship, Ursula, that saileth by the breath o' the Lord about the Lord's business, and she is called the *Joyful Deliverance*. See yonder at the main and here at the jackstaff flieth our flag o' deliverance, bold to God's wind."

Now, looking whither he pointed, I saw a broad red flag that bore for its symbol a great black hammer crossed by a broken shackle bolt very plain to see.

"Look you—yon is the Hammer o' Mercy striking asunder the Fetters o' Slavery. 'Tis the Symbol of Freedom. Ursula, there be eyes o' poor wretches that, groaning 'neath the lash, beholding this flag, ha' forgot their agony, have shouted for joy, because they knew it brought them deliverance from their cruel bondage, back to life or quick and merciful death. One thousand two hundred and three poor souls ha' we freed one way or t'other, since first we took and named this ship *Joyful Deliverance*.... But of yourself now, Mistress Ursula, since Japhet hath gotten you aboard ... what now?"

"Ha, this is the question!" nodded Lovepeace. "Japhet hath ever forbid women aboard—so now—what?"

"Oh, sir," I answered, venturing to steal a hand within the arm of each, "truly I scarce dare think."

"Nay," answered Master Penryn, patting my hand, "Japhet is no brutish satyr, no defiler of innocence. Hitherto he hath lived but for vengeance."

"Verily, Brother," nodded Lovepeace; "but now that he is cheated of his vengeance, how then? Moreover, he is young and this maid uncommon comely! And a glass or so o' rum i' the lad's head—ha? Man is a fire, woman's the tow, and the devil he comes and begins to blow! How then, Zeke? What I say is, having broke his own rule anent women aboard, he must abide the consequences, ay, and we must see to't as Christian men and comrades sworn."

"Assuredly, Lovepeace! Beyond doubting, messmate. Mistress Ursula," says he, squeezing my left arm, "we'll see thou'rt nothing harmed."

"Ay, so," quoth Lovepeace, squeezing my right arm, "we'll see thee right, lass!" Thus these two strange white-headed men walked me to and fro, talking thus of me and to me, and I taking mighty comfort in their kindly friendship and to see them so resolute for my welfare, little dreaming what was in their minds or what means they would take to my salvation. And now up from below cometh the little man Absalom Troy who, saluting my companions and scowling on me, spake in his Sussex drawl that (despite his scowl) warmed my heart:

"Sirs, by your leaves, the Cap'n wants ye alow in 's cabin."

"Why, very well, Absalom," answered Master Penryn, glancing askance at Lovepeace, who glanced sidelong at him.

"And why must ye scowl on the lady, Absalom?" demanded Lovepeace.

"Why, sir," answered Troy, finger to eyebrow, "I never knowed no manner o' luck on no ship nowhen and nowhere, wi' unmarried fe-males aboard."

"Very well, Absalom, you can go forward!" nodded Lovepeace; then taking leave of me, they descended to the lower deck. Thus alone I stood, leaning upon the richly carven rail, watching this noble ship as she rose buoyant to the rolling seas and so greatly heartened to think I had already won me three friends against this my hated abductor that, what with the glad wind, the joyous flash and sparkle of the wide ocean, I could almost have sung, when on the deck below, though at some distance, I saw divers swarthy fellows watching me and amongst these Don Luiz who, catching my glance, waved his feathered hat gallantly and bowed—and then, with flutter of petticoats, Deborah came running to clasp me in her arms.

"Oh, Mis' Ursula!" she cried, "I've wondered whatever was come of ee ... and a great blackamoor wi' gold rings in 's ears below, wi' all manner o' food for us—and silver dishes!"

So down I went with her to find a great black fellow who seemed all rolling eyes and flashing teeth, busy setting forth our meal.

"Tell me," said I breathlessly, "have you word for me?"

"Word, missy?" he repeated, goggling.

"A message from Don Luiz?"

"Laws, no, ma'm; I'se got no message from nobbudy."

"Are you Tom?"

"No, Missy; I's Peteran Paul, I is."

"Oh," says I at a loss; "why then, thank you and ... you may go forrard!" At this he showed his white teeth again and vanished. Then I sat to eat, with Deborah to serve me until I had her sit and share my meal.

"For," says I, "we be two poor prisoners and sisters in woe." Whereat she kissed me and vowing she couldn't so presume presently sat down at my command and a cheery meal (or very nearly) we made together.

Breakfast done, I had her fetch my diary, this same battered volume that is such vast use in the penning of this narrative, wherein I am boldly setting forth all that I saw, thought, did and said (or very nearly), nothing extenuating my own actions (as doth and shall appear). Nay here and now I do confess that I came very near to wrecking my own life and others therewith, for by my scheming came bloodshed, death and such dire perils to myself as you shall hear, and which now I do grieve for and tremble to think on.

I had been writing thus some while, when a knock on the door aroused me and, thinking it might be the black Tom at last with word from Don Luiz, I cried "Come in" and turning expectant, saw instead of this wished messenger the lean, odious face of Captain Japhet, whereat I instantly bent to my writing again, heeding him not at all.

"By your leave, sweet lady!" said he and seating himself opposite me at the table and taking out his snuffbox, sat tapping it softly until I could have struck him and, being unable to write a word, condescended to glance at him.

"Well, sir?" I demanded.

"So, ma'm," says he, with his quirking smile. "It seems you must and will be wed afore I'm ready for you."

"Wed?" says I, 'neath lifted brows.

"My good comrades, Ezekiel and Lovepeace (both very godly and virtuous men) have wooed me on your account, ma'm; your very passionate protestants, they have so pleaded, so argued and entreated that, seeing they insist your honour and my ship's honour requires it, I am here to say that since you are so desperate earnest to be wed eftsoons,—wed you I will and so be done."

Now at this I sank back in my chair, weak with amazement and speechless with indignation, while he inhaled a pinch of snuff and thereafter stared up at the gilded roof beams with look so martyrlike that (I do confess) I yearned to scratch him.

"What folly is this?" I demanded scornfully.

"Yours, ma'm, it seems!" he sighed mournfully. "For you have so filled the ears of my two companions with your chaste fears and maidenly terrors—and they men o' such fierce rectitude—that they are very insistent that I, poor soul, must wed you forthwith."

"Never!" cried I... "No, never in this world."

"Never?" he repeated. "'Tis true I had hoped to delay our union until you should learn to know me better and more

appreciate me, but—never? What, then, if these my so insistent comrades,—and both such grimly virtuous, determined men and, as I say, such passionate suitors on your behalf; what o' these, ma'm?"

"Captain Japhet," said I, speaking firmly as I might, "do not drive me too far, lest I bring death on you and ruin on your ship."

"I like the way you speak my name," he murmured, smiling at the snuffbox in his fingers. "'Tis better name than methought. But how and why destruction on my poor ship, ma'm?"

"Take warning!" I retorted. "Do not force a desperate woman to use all her powers. And now be so good to leave me."

"With joy, ma'm," he answered, bowing, "tempered with woe, for to talk with women is rare experience these days and you, though termagant and something shrewish, are very woman. I leave you to explain matters to your determined ambassadors as best you may." And so he left me; and when my anger was sufficiently abated, I set myself to write into my diary what had just passed betwixt us. In the middle of which I heard Deborah utter affrighted exclamation and, glancing whither she pointed, saw the door opening.

"Lord save us!" she exclaimed.

"Hush!" said I, rising, as swift and furtive came a mulatto youth, who rolling eyes in terrified fashion handed me a crumpled paper, whispering:

"Quick, m' lady ... if dey find me aft here, poor Tom shall be whipped ... quick, ma'm, quick—read and follow Tom." So unfolding this paper I saw these words very ill writ:

Come, noble signorita, and learn how I shall deliver you. Trust the bearer and haste.

So, being quite desperate, heeding not Deborah's expostulations, I rose and followed this shivering creature, who creeping before, now gestured me to stop, now beckoned me on by devious ways, until I found myself descending stairs into a dim place where stood rows of great cannon; and here Don Luiz met me, hat in hand. Him I followed until we reached another stairway and so up into the light once more; across a broad deck he led me, through a massive door into a place long and low and lit by window above, that showed me many wild-seeming men and these crowding about us; and looking round about upon them, my mind misgave me, for these were for the most part blackamoors and mulattos, and such white faces as I saw filled me with a quick, instinctive dread. And now, turning to Don Luiz, my dread waxed to a sick terror for this that I had deemed a courtly gentleman was leering on me with such hateful evil that I recoiled aghast.

"No!" I cried instinctively. "Ah, no! Let me out...." and I sprang for the door, but he was before me and as I strove desperately to pass, I knew the pain and shame of a blow that hurled me to the floor and crouching thus, more dead than alive, I saw how he raised his foot against me. But as I cowered, moaning, to meet his brutality, the mulatto Tom bestrode me, flashing the sword he bore and crying something in Spanish. Don Luiz recoiled, laughed and, sweeping off his hat, bowed to me.

"Your pardon, bewitching lady," he sighed, "but you angered me, you disobeyed and I am Don Luiz. For the little blow you alas caused me to bestow, I now grieve and later you shall be kissed—ah, yes! But for now that I win for you the ship one way or the other way—" Here he paused and turned as came a thunderous hammering on the door and thereafter a voice that filled me with such joyous and thankful relief as caused me great wonder later on, for this was the voice of that so hated man, Captain Japhet Bly.

CHAPTER VIII

TELLETH HOW BY MY FOLLY CAME STRIFE AND BLOODSHED

"Ramirez, open this door!"

"Bly, go you to the devil!"

"Ramirez, open this door!"

"On a condition!"

"This is mutiny, Ramirez!"

"Ay, so!" laughed Ramirez. "But then, we have your mistress here, and we be nineteen determined men and armed, Captain, armed. And our condition is—your woman for your ship. Take to the boats, you and such as will, and on my faith, your lady shall be delivered to you scatheless, Master Bly. Otherwise ..."

"Otherwise, Ramirez?"

"'Stead o' one lover, she shall have aplenty and we, *par Dios*, shall fight till the ship sinks under us."

Now at this he was silent so long that Ramirez questioned furiously at last.

"Damn you, will ye speak? What's your word?"

Answered the Captain, voice passionless as ever:

"Curse you, Ramirez, I'm thinking, man, thinking."

"Here's no time for thought!" cried Ramirez.

"Yet was I never so thoughtful as now, Ramirez."

The Captain's serene voice seemed to madden Ramirez, for he stamped passionately, muttering fiercely and, whipping pistol from belt, peered through one of the many loopholes cut in the stout timbering that ran athwart the ship.

"Ha!" cried he in voice suddenly shrill. "Why are the yards aback?"

"Were you right sailorman, Ramirez, 'stead o' mere rogue, you'd know!"

"Enough—enough!" cried Ramirez, well-nigh beside himself. "Are you come to terms? Do we take the ship or your woman—which? Speak, damn ye, speak! What d' ye say?"

"Ramirez, I'll kill you for this."

"Pah, I'll adventure it. Meanwhile, till you've made up your mind, I'll adventure some few pleasantries with your stately lady here."

"And you shall die little by little, my Ramirez; ay, so very slowly, you shall plead and supplicate for death—"

"Ah, bah! Is this your answer?"

"Ay, damned rogue, this is my final answer!" For a moment Don Luiz stood wide-eyed, like one at sudden loss, and I faint with horror and emotion sharper yet, that Captain Japhet should leave me to such abomination; then even as I stood, scarce believing he could doom me to such unspeakable horror, Don Luiz, uttering passionate cry, levelled his pistol through the loophole; but at that moment, scarce knowing what I did, I leaped and seized his arm to such purpose that as he gave fire the shot flew wide. Then, although half deafened by the report, I heard Don Luiz cry out on me, and seeing all the bestial, merciless savagery of him, I averted my eyes instinctively and thus, chancing to glance upward, beheld the window open and through it a levelled musket and behind this the grim face of Master Lovepeace Farrance: then was roaring flame, gushing smoke and down through the swirling mist tumbled men who shouted and smote, and all about me

was roaring, furious tumult.

And after some while, this dreadful uproar subsided and the smoke clearing, I saw men who knelt with empty hands upraised, and others who lay very dreadfully still, while before and above them, in posture fierce and threatening, stood old Lovepeace, grimmer than ever, with Parson Penryn, his great wig over one fierce eye, and the Captain his white teeth bared in cruel smile and a reddened sword in his hand.

"So, my rogues," says he, panting somewhat, "are ye done? D' ye cry quarters, my bullies? Is this an end o' damned mutiny?"

"Ay ... ay, Captain ..." cried voices in wailing chorus. "Spare our lives, Cap'n. We was led into 't, Cap'n. We be true men an' ye'll spare us, sir. 'Twas Ramirez, Cap'n. Ay, ay, 'twas him as tricked us...."

"Where is he?" demanded the Captain, staring this way and that.

"Yonder he lieth, Japhet," answered Lovepeace, smoothing his snowy locks. "And sweet in death, lad. I shot him, glory be! And now what for these verminous dogs?"

"Death!" chanted Master Penryn in his sweet voice, straightening his great wig with hands dreadfully smeared. "Let 'em hang with a curse!"

"Ay, Cap'n, swing 'em up to the main yard. Hang 'em and be done.... Let's do't forthright.... Up, ye mutinous lubbers!" cried other fierce voices ... and to my horror, the conquerors fell to beating and kicking the vanquished to their feet; this so wrought on me that despite my bruises up sprang I, and coming betwixt the conquered wretches and their tormentors:

"Shame!" cried I, fronting them with arms outspread above these abased wretches. "You have beaten them till they cry for mercy; then as you may all hope for mercy one day, show it now. These men have promised amendment and one of them saved me from hurt.... Howbeit, you shall not touch them, whiles I have strength to stand.... Let them go, I say—let them go!"

Now at this, old Lovepeace stared on me, grim mouth agape, Master Penryn took off his great wig, looked at it earnestly and put it on again, while the Captain, head bowed, viewed me bright-eyed 'neath puckered brows. Then he laughed suddenly, a soft, odd laugh.

"So be it, ma'm," said he. "Since you saved my life from murderer's bullet, take these lives in exchange." Hereupon and to my no small dismay, these beaten wretches, the wounded and the sound, came thronging about me on their knees, crying out their gratitude and calling down blessings on me, so that I presently turned and fled from that reeking place into the sweet fresh wind. But here, a weakness coming upon me, I sank upon a coil of rope and closed my eyes, till hearing footsteps approaching, looked up to see this tall man Barnabas looking down upon me.

"Mistress Ursula," said he in gentle voice and mighty courteous, "in saving yon poor rogues, you have broke all 'stablished rules and precedents among the Coast Brethren and won you as many doglike friends shall bark to your bidding—yet such dogs bite."

"Sir, do you warn me?"

"Ay, I do," says he gently, "for yon poor rascals are the very offscourings of this motley crew. One wonders how you came in such ill company."

"Oh, sir," I answered, being very shamed and humble, "by my own headstrong, detestable folly."

"Madam," said he, his comely face the more so for sudden, youthful smile, "I perceive you are wise as you are courageous—almost."

"Nay," says I, the humbler for his praise, "I know myself very fool."

"And this is wisdom!" he nodded.

"Tell me, sir, they will not hang or whip these prisoners,—not one?"

"Nay, madam, their lives are promised and Japhet never breaks his word."

"I hear overmuch of your Captain Japhet."

"Why, he is our Captain."

"And would have left me to ... evil worse than death."

"No, no! Japhet is wily fellow, for see you while he held Ramirez in parley, we were stealing outboard to take 'em suddenly from above."

"You are great friend of his?"

"'Tis so mine honour, madam."

"And hast known him long?"

"These twelve odd years."

"Are you Captain also?"

"No!" he answered, smiling. "I stand second in command."

"And who next?"

"Penryn."

"But he is a parson, or was."

"He is yet, but also a right sailorman. Then comes John Shaddock, the master, stout old Lovepeace the gunner, with Richard Agnew his mate, Absalom Troy the bosun, and so you have us all. And yonder cometh Japhet now—"

"Ay, I see him," said I, rising: "pray lend me your arm as far as my cabin." So with his assistance I hurried away and despite my bruises until I reached that stair or gangway leading down to the cabin; and being much taken with his comely person and gentle courtsey, I would have had him sit with me and talk awhile, but:

"Thank you, Mistress Revell," said he, bowing like the very gentleman I now perceived him to be, "but I am something foul with the little business in the forecastle, and yourself still something discomposed, I think, so, later if you will honour me." When he was gone, I came to the mirror Deborah had set for me against the panelling and was aghast to see my face all smirched, my hair half down and dragged to elf-locks, and the delicate laces at my bosom all rent and torn. I was yet contemplating this sorry wretch that was me, when, with no civility of knocking, in strode Captain Japhet and stood looking on me with eyes so sternly contemptuous that for once speech failed me and I averted my gaze.

"Madam," said he at last, in voice scornful as his look, "the black rascal Tom hath confessed he carried your letter from the arch mutineer Ramirez."

"And what then, sir?" I demanded indignantly, though with glance still averted and bitterly conscious of my drabble-tail appearance.

"This," says he, softly fierce; "were you a man, you should be trussed up and well flogged and thereafter be clapped i' the bilboes—"

"But I am a woman, thank God."

"And like so many of your abhorred sex, a very plague. There be two men forrard dead by reason o' you! Ay, my lady, you are such woman that two men be dead and maybe others, and all by reason o' you and your cursed womanly guile—"

"No!" cried I, horrified. "No! Never dare say so! Their deaths lie on your own wicked head, for 'twas you forced me into your hateful ship; 'twas your own vile, odious, most detested self that every hour teaches me to the more abominate you."

"And this," said he, "gives me to wonder why you should trouble to save my so hated self."

"You are presumptuous to dare think I did save you, ay—or ever would."

"Peevish, silly child!" he answered and, turning on his heel, left me raging. But even as I came once more to survey myself in the mirror, tearfully and more rueful than ever, he was back again.

"I came but to warn you, madam," said he ungraciously, "that it may blow to-night, and bid you when the ship rolls and pitches not to think we are going to the bottom—"

"'Twould be happy release!"

"Mayhap,—and yet who knoweth; for should we sink, we sink together!" Then, with his odious, chuckling laugh, he was gone. And presently came Deborah to sigh over me and to bathe and tend my poor body, its bruises which of themselves waked in me fierce desire for vengeance on this vilest of men.

CHAPTER IX

TELLETH AMONG OTHER MATTERS HOW, SEATED ON A COIL OF ROPE, HE TALKED AND I HEARKENED PERFORCE

With evening it seemed his prediction was to be fulfilled, for the ship became very uneasy, an ever-growing agitation, so when the great blackamoor whose name it seemed was PeteranPaul summoned and bowed us in to sup, we found it a matter of no little difficulty to eat and especially drink. Now Deborah and I, being Sussex born and bred, do love the sea and moreover her father, John Purdy, is captain of a lugger and would oft-times take us a-sailing to the French coast, so that we were something inured to rough weather.

Thus it was that, supper done, I donned my cloak and despite Deborah's remonstrations (and my bruises) went up the companion; but scarce was my head above deck than my breath was stopped by the sweet rush of wind, back went my hood, out streamed my hair, but up I went and, staggering to the rail, clung there, deafened, buffeted yet wondrously heartened. Westward the sun was sinking angry and red and amid dark, rolling clouds, but in every foam-capped billow was a glory; above my head the great sails, close-reefed, drove the noble ship through hissing spray, while the wind, this great glad wind, piped and whistled in the rigging.

"Lord love you now!" boomed a voice in my ear. "You've a heart, lass, a very stout sailorly heart, to stand there a-singing so joyous!" And I found old Lovepeace beside me, his long white locks streaming even as my own.

"Was I singing?" said I, speaking into his down-bent ear. "Nay, surely not."

"Ay, but you was so!" he nodded. "Happy as a bird, merry as any grig, daughter. Nay, but," says he, frowning and shaking grim head at me, "since you and me has taken each other for shipmates true, and myself old enow to be thy granddad, it behoveth me to very heartily reprove thee, Ursula, thy most unmaidenly forwardness to traffic wi' such notable villain and foul-lived dog as yon Ramirez, with a curse!"

"Nay," cried I, reaching to his ear, "he is dead and therefore above and beyond our vain judgment, Lovepeace. And 'tis great wonder to me that man so reverent-seeing as thyself should show joy in slaying any man."

"Nay, a papistical treacherous son of Belial, daughter! Is it not writ o' such, 'They shall wither as the grass? They shall be harrowed with harrows and sawn asunder wi' saws!'"

"Amen to that!" piped a melodious voice in my other ear, and Master Penryn was beside me, his great wig replaced by close-fitting seaman's bonnet. "We are of the Lord's elect, child, chosen instruments to be unrelenting extirpation of evil and the ungodly, be it by exhortation, supplication or extermination, by round shot or thrust o' steel. But now, Ursula, needs must thou be chidden for thy naughty doing ... to stoop for such vile, pestiferous company as—"

"Nay, sirs," cried I, drawing them near to speak above buffeting wind, "'tis rather for me to chide ye both that ye should speak, and behind my back, of marriage and to your detested Captain Japhet—"

"But your honour demands he right you by wedlock—"

"Ay!" bellowed old Lovepeace. "Your good name commands it."

"And myself," cried I, "utterly refuse to think o' such union—honour or no!"

"God bless my soul!" ejaculated Master Penryn.

"Lord save us!" boomed Lovepeace, and they both looked at me and each other in such dismayed perplexity that I began to laugh, trill on trill, in the midst of which up the ladder comes Captain Japhet, to catch me at it (and this the first time I had so such as smiled since finding myself in his hateful ship) and, staring on me 'neath the vivid neckerchief tied about his head in place of hat and wig:

"I should advise you go below, ma'm," quoth he. "How's she lie now, Penryn?"

"Sir," cried I indignantly. "You insult me—"

"No!" said he, with his quirking leer. "I enquire our course of Mr. Penryn, officer o' the watch."

"West and by south, sir!" answered Penryn.

"Hold her so, sir. And now, ma'm, I bid you get below. The wind's rising and this deck is no place for you." Here Penryn and Lovepeace made their bows to me and walked away together.

"Well, sir," I retorted, "I love the wind so shall tarry here a while."

"On the contrary, ma'm, you'll obey and instantly, or demme, I'll bundle ye over my shoulder and carry ye."

"Odious wretch!" I shouted at him, high above bellowing wind.

"Ma'm," shouted he, "your futile repetitions weary me—begone!" And because of the brutal look of him, I went, though at my leisure.

Reaching the companion or gangway, I paused for final glance about me and saw with some little qualm how the seas had risen while the wind seemed now to pipe an angrier note. So I descended the stair, though mighty awkwardly by reason of the violent lurchings of the ship, so that, reaching the cabin, I all but fell into Deborah's arms.

"Lord, Mis' Ursula, ma'm," gasped she, as we clung together, "you and me has seen rough weather aboard my father's boat ere now but ... naught the like o' this!"

"No matter," I answered, as we stumbled to the cushioned locker; "we shall not suffer this to daunt us."

"No, ma'm—leastways, I hope not!" But, despite these brave words, my apprehensions grew, what with the shrill, fierce clamour of the wind and the shock and buffet of the thunderous, hissing seas that smote the labouring vessel until we thought it great wonder she could endure. And each moment the cruel power of howling wind and boisterous wave increased upon us, or so it seemed to poor me, threatening our sure destruction; and bethinking me by whose wicked will I must needs suffer all this and my life now in such dire hazard, my anger 'gainst Captain Japhet flamed anew, casting out fear. Insomuch that girding on my heavy riding cloak, I put aside Deborah's detaining arms and made my way up the companion, to find the door shut but, opening this with no little to-do, I stumbled out into a bellowing riotous wind that seemed as 'twould blow me overboard; but setting my teeth, I fought my way to a corner sheltered from its fury and here seated, knees to chin, I looked about me with an awed, fearsome joy.... Before me loomed the ship with dim lights here and there, her great yards close-reefed, her lofty masts swaying dizzily against a whirling cloud wrack, whence peeped a fitful moon whose fugitive beams showed mighty billows that foamed up and were gone, a wild sea wherein the labouring vessel drove furiously, her mighty bows soaring up to poise suspended, then plunging in clouds of flying spray, down and down, until I held my breath lest she dive headlong into these awful deeps....

Suddenly from somewhere near by a bell rang in mellow chime and the shadowy decks that had seemed so deserted were thronged with men dim seen, who laughed and shouted cheerily to each other and so vanished again in the shadows. Then one came clambering up the nearest ladder and, knowing him, despite storm gear and great sea boots, I crouched back amid the shadows instinctively.

"Aft there," he bellowed, "how's her head?" To this a voice presently wailed in hoarse reply which seemed to please him for:

"Ay, ay!" he roars. "She rides sweet to 't! Keep her so, Ben." Whereat the voice wailed again and he set to marching back and forth, despite the swaying deck, so that I yearned some obstacle might catch and trip the hatefully assured legs of him and was even looking round for some means whereby I might bring this about, when he espied me and came clumping in his great boots.

"So, 'tis yourself again. Madam Mischief!" says he, stooping to peer down at me and his face all wet with spray. "What do ye here?"

"Watch!" said I. "And wait for death!"

"And with eyes bright with the joy o' life!" said he, peering closer. "And why must you be ever defying your Captain?" he demanded.

"You are no Captain of me, thank God!" I retorted scornfully. "And take heed, sir, should this cruel wind wreck your ship and yon ravening sea swallow me this night, I call heaven to witness you are my murderer."

"Oho!" quoth he, and sat down beside me on my coil of rope, whereupon I instantly made to rise, but:

"Pray be seated, ma'm," said he, and with rude hand plucked me down again, "for since you are here, let us talk!"

"Not a word!" cried I.

"Good!" he nodded, "for I will! And first 'tis no cruel wind this, but a jolly, sailorman's wind; and as for dying, I'll vow in all your ladyship's ladylike days you was never so much alive. Also 'tis become so evident you love my ship, I protest were you gentlewoman of gentler nature I could wed you, since I must, with better heart." Here he paused as expecting me to retort on him, but finding me silent, he went on:

"And now, ma'm, since we must, alas! to matrimony anon, if you will continue to keep thy chatterbox tongue thus wonderfully still, I'll forthwith tell thee somewhat of thy spouse-elect—in fine, myself, ma'm, this poor Japhet, what he was, is and would be—ay, and wherefore—"

"I had rather hearken to this howling wind!"

"The which is manifest lie!" quoth he. "For, ma'm Ursula, you are passionate to know the who, how and what of me." Here I made a second and more determined effort to rise, only to find his odious arm about me that forced me brutally to panting, outraged submission.

"Beastly fellow, loose me!"

"Tender ma'm, bide you still and suffer thy poor, humble Japhet discourse o' Japhet."

"Not a word!"

"Then alack for thee, ma'am, for now will I sing instead." And sure enough while sea and wind raged about this sheltered corner, he begins his fool song of "Heave yo-ho with a rumbleow" and the like senselessness whiles I sat, as if unaware of him, my patient gaze uplift to the flying clouds which were rent suddenly, torn and scattered, and out shone the bright moon to show me such scene as for the moment lifted me beyond all mere thoughts of myself ... and this a sea of raging billows that seemed hurling us to destruction. But seeing how this brave ship met their thunderous onset and rode their fury, waging such bitter battle for our very lives, I must have cried out my admiration, for I heard my companion laugh joyously; then his arm was about me, had swept me to him and holding me thus detestably prisoned breast to breast, he laughed again joyously.

"Faith, now!" said he. "Mine's none so bad a bargain; thou'rt fit mate for a sailorman!" And now, reading his purpose in his eyes, I strove to free my clenched hands; then he had loosed me and I, leaping to my feet, was staggered by the furious wind that cast me into his arms again, whereat cries he:

"Nay, fie, ma'm, not again so soon! Do not cuddle your man too often ... learn a coy restraint, ma'm."

"Odious!" cried I, flashing my eyes at him through my wind-blown hair. "Do not speak! Do not touch me!"

"Ay, ay, ma'm! Then make fast to my girdle here, lest the wind puff ye overboard." And what with the gale and tumbling deck, I must needs endure his aid (to my bitter mortification) and not another word until I had reached the companionway. Then:

"Pleasant dreams, Ursula ma'm," said he; "ay, dream thou'rt cuddling poor Japhet—" At this I left him and finding Deborah fast asleep, undressed and put myself to bed, and hearkening to the hiss and tumult of the great seas that raged so near, grew drowsy none the less with pleasant sense of well-being, though my last conscious thought was this—whether, indeed, this so hated man would indeed have kissed me? And ... if so ...

CHAPTER X

SHOWETH HOW OUR BRAVE SHIP JUSTIFIED HER NAME

To record here the daily entries in my journal would be but vain repetition and draw out this narration to wearisome length. Therefore, though each and every day proved more or less eventful, I will begin this chapter with that (to me) never-to-be-forgotten day when we first sighted the two Moorish galleys, since in very truth this day, to wit June the second, was to prove in some sense the most memorable in my life.

It was afternoon and the day hot, for we were nearing the warm latitudes. I was seated beneath an awning they had rigged for me behind (or as I should say, abaft) the mizzenmast, when I espied them first, two long shapes, black against the western glow, with lofty, peaked sails, and plying long oars, for the wind was fallen light. And as I watched their approach, their long, moving oars seemed like the outsprawled, wriggling legs of some monstrous insect; indeed, very ugly craft I thought them. Insomuch that, seeing Captain Japhet near by and none other that I might question, I contrived to meet his glance, whereupon he came beside my chair.

"Well, ma'm?" he enquired very ungraciously (and this the first time I had noticed him in an hour). "What now?"

"Those evil-looking ships."

"Galleys," he nodded.

"Well, but why do they follow us?"

"Because 'tis so their nature, being pirates."

"Pirates!" I gasped, sitting upright of a sudden.

"Indeed, ma'm! And out of Algiers, by their trim."

"Why then, why not sail away from them—instantly?" I demanded.

"So we are, ma'm, and slowly as we may."

"But why—gracious heaven!—why slowly?"

"That they may come up with us for sure."

"Then you mean ... oh ... to fight with them?"

"Right heartily!" he nodded. "In two hours we should be hard at it."

"But there are two."

"Ay, they generally hunt in pairs." So saying, he went to the quarter rail and leaning down thence,

"Below there," he cried. "Pass the word for Absalom Troy." And presently up the ladder cometh Troy the boatswain who, touching an eyebrow, stood very upright and I saw he was belted with a heavy sword and two pistols.

"Pipe the crew aft, Absalom!"

"Ay, ay, Cap'n," and setting whistle to lip, Absalom Troy blew thereon a sweet and mellow blast, whereupon from gangways amidships and forward came men so many that I wondered how and where they could all have been bestowed, and with them came tall Barnabas with Penryn, Lovepeace and divers other officers.

And now, coming to the rail, Captain Japhet looked down on them and spoke much on this wise:

"Men and messmates all, in especial such as be new among us, hearkee: This ship is the *Joyful Deliverance*, pledged to fight all slaveships, no matter what flag they fly, and free all slaves. Yonder in our lee four miles and coming up handily be Moorish pirates and lusty fighters, perchance worth the looting—well and good. But aboard these floating hells, slaving 'neath the lash to serve their oars, be men the like of us, Christians and therefore brothers, whether they be

Englishmen or no. Therefore, Master Gunner, when we bring 'em to action, see your lads aim high at masts and upper works; and you, messmates, when ye follow me aboard 'em, do as little hurt to these poor slaves as ye may. I and Master Barnabas here shall lead the boarders as ever and, whiles we amuse their fighting men, Master Penryn with Master Farrance and such o' ye as they ha' already chosen, shall free the slaves o' their shackles."

So, with many cheers, away sped these men (and mighty cheerful) so that presently the ship seemed deserted, yet from below rose a stir and hum that told of grim yet joyful preparation.

And now, the others being all gone about this hateful business, Captain Japhet turned to me.

"Ma'm Ursula," said he, glancing from me to those black galley ships that showed much nearer now, "in an hour you will go below—"

"No, sir," said I firmly.

"You will be below your cabin on the orlop."

"What is that?"

"A deck, ma'm, well below the waterline, where no chance shot may reach. I have furnished a place there—"

"And so," said I, rising, "you will thus adventure your ship and the lives of your crew—ay, and my life, for sake of men you have never seen."

"Ay, I will, ma'm."

"And why, sir—why?" I demanded. "Wherefore run this deadly peril?"

"You know, ma'm, you heard! Moreover, 'tis in fulfilment of an oath we o' the *Deliverance* swore years ago, ay, and one we have held by since I took command o' this ship. For most of us have slaved aboard such hellish craft ere now," and he showed me his scarred wrist.

"And suppose they capture us?" He laughed grimly.

"This *Deliverance* is such fighting ship she shall fight even as she sinks."

"Well, and if she sink, sir? How then—what of me?"

"You, eh, ma'm? Faith, you plague yourself with care for yourself most damnably. Howbeit an' we sink, you die, ma'm, along with the rest on us—"

"Thus, sir, should the worse befall, I must die by reason of your selfish oath."

"Selfish oath?" he repeated, pondering the words. "Can such oath be selfish?... Mayhap. Howbeit, in a while I and these my comrades (hale and well) shall be risking death and wounds to win poor wretches from misery to chance o' life—"

"And for loot!" cried I bitterly.

"Ay—this too!" he nodded, eyeing me askance. "We take what we may, since the labourer is worthy of his hire."

"In fine, sir, spite all your sophistry anent freeing of slaves, poor Deborah and I are to run peril of death by wind and battle that you may go a-pirating on your own account."

"Madam," says he scowling, "when you are my wife, I think I shall begin by thrashing you soundly." At this I turned my back, waving him to begone, and with ogreish snort away he strode, yet presently was back again and clapping hand on my shoulder, spun me round to face him. And now, to my wonder, he spake me almost pleading:

"Ursula, why will you seem baser than you are,—such peevish, light, selfish creature? Let us suppose death should take us to-day; well—we die in right good cause; better so than in the hunting field or fevered of a surfeit." Now, while he spoke, I saw old Lovepeace on the lower deck with divers of his fellows casting loose the great cannon that stood there and looking to their tackle, and this woke in me such apprehension for the horror of bloodshed that should ensue that I turned on the Captain, reviling him for manslayer and murderous ogre, and so bitterly that he gave back before me like

one amazed; then without another word strode off, while I turned again to watch old Lovepeace and his fellows so busied with their murderous cannons, and my poor heart fluttering to know these soon would be thundering death and destruction for sake of foreign rogues doomed to slavery for their crimes.

Suddenly from atop our mainmast flutters that great scarlet flag, its symbol of the Broken Fetter plain to see even at such height, and from this I glanced again at the galleys, now so much closer that I could almost count the great oars that rose and fell with rhythmic beat and swing,—two long, low vessels that seemed creeping upon us with such fell and murderous intent. And even as I watched them, my flesh a-chill, I must needs remember his words anent dying in good cause, and from this I got to reflecting how he had reviled me as light-minded, selfish and the like. In the midst of which comes Deborah with her sewing.

"La, ma'm," says she above her flying needle, "here's you miles and miles across ocean and but four shifts to your poor sweet back—and one o' them I be a-mending now."

"Deborah," said I, between snapping teeth, "am I peevish, selfish and light-minded?"

"Oh, my precious lamb, no, never. You be mine own sweet, tender bird—"

"And yet I've—sworn at you often, Deborah."

"Nay, but so tenderly, ma'm, and only now and then."

"I've slapped thee, Deborah, and pulled thy pretty hair over and over again! I have, yes, I have, and don't dare deny it! You know I have."

"But oh, Mis' Ursula, you be so fiery-like and I know didst never mean to hurt me."

"Ay, but I did! Oh, my Deborah, thou sweet, patient soul," cried I, kissing her suddenly and to her own surprise. "Now should I ever buffet thee again—strike me back: dost hear?"

"Oh, my dearie, I never nowise couldn't so forget my duty ... nay, my own sweet, why dost weep?"

"Because," said I, burying face on her shoulder, "he is such vile, detestable man and I—hate him."

"Do ee mean the Captain, ma'm? Hush now, for yon he comes this moment." Drying my eyes, I glanced round to see him approaching and followed by a squat, red-headed seaman bearing a lanthorn.

"Madam," says the Captain with his stateliest air, "I am come to show you to the orlop."

"And how if I say I'll remain here, sir?"

"Tom Parsons,—aft here!" he commanded. "Now madam, obey, or Tom shall carry ye like so much dunnage." And now I shivered with disgust to see how this red-headed sailorman spat upon his great hands, then looked to his Captain for further orders; and so because I needs must, I followed, and Deborah too, whither we were led.

Downstairs we went and still down, into the very bowels of the ship, until we reached a narrow chamber, or rather noisome den, ill-lit by smoky, swinging lanthorn and furnished with a table and two narrow couches.

"What foul and fetid prison is this?" said I, handkerchief to nostrils.

"At the least, madam," he answered, gesturing the man Parsons to be gone, "here ye shall come to no harm, and that so precious body of yours, that dainty flesh and blood that you prize so infinite much, shall take no chance hurt. And if the reek o' bilge offends thy delicacy,—well, 'tis better than searing bullet or to be crushed 'neath falling spar. So content you, madam. And now have you aught to say to me?"

"This, sir," I answered passionately. "I am not the craven wretch you deem me.... I do not fear your cannons or swords and would peril life gladly for any and with any man save such ... such—"

"Say it, ma'am, say it with round good oath," said he in his lazy voice.

"Such base, ravishing wretch as yourself!" I ended.

"And now, ma'am," said he, with his quirking smile, "hast aught else to tell me,—any wish for poor Japhet—alive or dead. What—no? Then farewell to thee, Ursula, until—we meet again." So saying, he went out, closing and locking the door behind him. And now, when it was too late, I beat upon the door, calling his name, until Deborah drew me gently upon the couch and opening her large eyes, pleaded to know what it was all about. But ere I could speak came the thunderous boom of a cannon, that was presently answered remotely by another, so that I judged the ships come near enough to begin the battle. But now ensued a long interval of silence, wherein we clung together, hearkening expectant for sounds louder and more fearful. And now my poor Deborah began to weep softly, splashing me with her tears (that are ever so ready and copious) and then she began to pray and in the middle:

"Oh!" she gasped. "If he is killed ... if he is killed!" and then she moaned.

"Ah, true, Deborah," I whispered, well-nigh sobbing too. "If he should be killed! And I so railed on him ... and not one kind word and his hateful eyes so pleading." And then my words were drowned in such dreadful roar and the ship itself so quivering and rocking that I thought we must be blown up; till came other shots singly and together, now very near and now afar, and ever before my eyes a face so pleading and reproachful that hiding my face in Deborah's neck:

"If I had said but one kind word!" I gasped.

"Oh," sobbed Deborah, "if they kill my poor Ben, 'twill break my heart."

"Ben?" said I, wondering.

"Oh, 'twas him lifted me into the boat so gentle!" she wailed. "'Tis him hath so looked and looked on me when he might and ... kissed me behind your back, so clever, ma'm, and give me this little gold cross and 'oh, lass,' says he and so modest, ma'm, 'twill keep ee from harm and my heart goes wi' 't!' says he."

"Lord, Deborah, I had no thought of this—"

"No more had I, ma'm, leastways not much till he kissed me, and the little cross; see here it be!" And drawing the cross from her bosom, she pressed it to her rosy lips, kissing it so fervently that I was amazed, for Deborah had proved something of a coquette ere now.

"Why, Deborah," said I, "you really love this man?"

"Ay, for sure, for sure!" she sobbed. "Wi' all my body and soul!"

"But gracious me, Deborah, you've scarce seen him."

"Ay, true, ma'm, yet enough to know he be the one ... the only man.... And now if he be killed ..." So now I set myself to comfort her as best I might and she so sweetly grateful therefor as moved me to a tenderness for her greater than I had ever known. Thus down in our noisome prison we two poor souls shivered, and clasped and comforted each other, while above us cannon roared and thundered and all about us and over us fierce battle raged, while ever and anon above this dreadful tumult rose wild shouts and hoarse cheering. Awhile thus we clung together (as I say), being shocked and terrified by this universal din; but presently in the dark above us I espied a trap-door, so I mounted the table and reaching this trap found to my joy that I could lift it. So on the table I placed a chair and with Deborah to steady this, up I climbed and, throwing back the trap-door, saw nothing but gloom. Nevertheless, with Deborah's unwilling aid, and deaf to her remonstrances, I scrambled through and standing in the darkness looked about me until afar I saw a vague light that I argued must be another trap-door.

"Deborah," says I, peering down at her anxious face, "bide you there—"

"Nay, ma'm, don't leave me!" she wailed. "For 'deed, I dursn't venture me up there—" Thus assured, I turned and began to make my way toward that vague radiance, when down I pitched over some obstacle. Shaken, though all undeterred, I went on more cautiously and so presently came to a ladder and climbing this, found myself on another deck where the light, much stronger, showed me a gangway with steps. And there I paused dismayed, for now the din of battle was much louder; above me was the wild trampling of many feet and confused uproar of voices pierced ever and anon by the hoarse shout of old Lovepeace, with the more dreadful wailing of stricken men, while in my nostrils was the choking reek of gunpowder.

And after some while, summoning all my resolution, I went creeping up the stair into a place so thick with smoke that I could scarce see my way and thus presently stumbled on something that stirred to my foot, groaning dismally ... and now, as I recoiled, shocked and trembling, I heard again old Lovepeace roar.

"High it is, my lads—aim high. Sweep their fo'castle and poop; so shall the Lord make 'em as corn to the sickle—" Guiding myself by this familiar roar, I presently came where he stood beside a great cannon, peering along it through the porthole, yet scarce knew him, so black was he with powder smoke and his long white hair streaked dreadfully with blood.

"Oh, Master Lovepeace," cried I, "show me how to get up into the daylight."

"How now!" he exclaimed, "Good lack, is 't thee, child? And here on my gun deck... Ahoy, Ben!" he roared. "Ben, come you and bear this lady aloft."

"Ay, ay, sir," cried a voice behind me and then powerful arms swept me up and I was looking into the face above me, a comely face despite its grime and I saw he had great gold rings in his ears. And now, as he bore me on and up, and with wondrous ease, said I:

"Are you the Ben that gave a gold cross to my maid Deborah?"

"Ay, I be so, lady," he answered, nodding.

"And do you then love her truly, Ben?"

"Ay, I do so, lady," said he, nodding more fervently and looking down on me with such bright, honest eyes I must needs believe him.

"Why, then," said I, "should we ever win safe back to England, and your love endure so long, there shall be a cottage for you when she's your wife." Now at this he gaped at me, then:

"Lord!" he exclaimed, "Lord love me!" And so he brought me up into the blessed daylight.

"At your service, lady!" quoth he, setting me down. "But I'm needed alow; my gun be short-'anded like!" And so, touching an eyebrow at me, he vanished back into the smoke of old Lovepeace's gun deck. And now, when I turned to reach that which is called the poop, I stood suddenly aghast, for there outstretched before me, and all about him a horrible stain, lay poor Tom Parsons most dreadfully dead. For a moment I stood sick and nigh aswoon at this ghastly sight then, stumbling to the great mast, I sank down thereby, striving against a growing faintness; and as I crouched, deafened by the wild clamour about me, my eyes smarting with powder smoke, high and clear above this roaring hubbub one shouted:

"Forrard there, Ezekiel!"

"Ay, ay, Japhet!" cried Penryn's sweetly sonorous voice.

"Pass Farrance the word to cease fire."

"Ay, ay, Japhet!" And now, looking up, I saw him high above me on that lofty deck they call the poop, gesturing to the steersman with his drawn sword. And presently he cried again:

"Forrard there, Ezekiel!"

"Ay, ay, Japhet!"

"Stand by to grapple by the larboard."

"Ay so, Japhet."

And now, coming to the ship's side, he leaned there, peering down through the drifting smoke.

"All's fast, Japhet!"

"Then pipe the boarders!" Hereupon rose the clear flute-like twitter of Absalom Troy's silver pipe, and then as the men

sprang, mustering themselves, down the ladder came Captain Japhet to run and place himself at their head.

"Boarders away!" he cried. I saw him leap to the ship's side, saw the flash of his sword and then he had vanished and after him Penryn and the rest of the men, cheering fiercely and brandishing swords, pikes and axes, until the deck showed deserted save for one or two shapes that lay so dreadfully mute and still.

Then I too had reached the ship's side and peering down saw that I shall nevermore forget.

Directly below me lay one of the galleys, her tall mast shot away and all aflash and aflicker with cruel steel, where men smote and stabbed at each other with a dreadful fury. I saw Captain Japhet smitten to his knees and his smiter transfixed on the long sword of Master Barnabas. And then, what with these ghastly sights and the foul reek of this galley, I shrank half-swooning once more. When I looked again, I beheld Mr. Penryn and his fellows amid the rowing benches where men were chained like beasts. And then, with a roar, the slaves broke free and, like wild beasts indeed, leapt to action; barehanded, with their broken shackles or weapons snatched haphazard, they fought and with such dire ferocity that when I dared look again the battle was ended; and I staring and staring amid that close-packed press for one that should be there, yet one I could not see.

I beheld these new-freed slaves embracing their deliverers or dancing half-naked in their rags, singing for joy while others wept and some prayed, though many lay sprawled in death among the spattered rowing benches; yet look where I might, nowhere could I see the one form I sought. And then I heard his voice ring out strong above the din:

"Comrades all, stand by! Ye that were slaves are free, this galley yours to bear ye where ye will. Only this,—first ye shall aid us to trans-ship such o' the cargo as we will. And now, are there any among ye that be Englishmen?"

"That am I.... And I.... I too!" cried divers of them.

"Why then, such o' ye as choose to ship 'neath the Broken Shackle along of us, get aboard." And now, seeing them about to throw their dead into the sea (friend and foe alike), I made my way back to the poop and from this eminence saw how the *Deliverance* was scarred here and there by shot and her decks horridly splashed with deep and awful stains. Nevertheless, I looked upon the great ship now with tender eyes, since it seemed she was indeed a deliverance from such horror of cruelty as till now had been far beyond my imagination.

The battle being done, I stood where I might watch the aftermath of this dreadful business. And great wonder was it to me to see with what speed and cheery goodwill these freed slaves aided their deliverers to strip the galley of the richest of her cargo.

But presently hearing a scream, I turned from the busy scene and beheld a man, very bloody, busied tending divers of the wounded where they lay, and shuddering turned me aside, and thus espied another who watched, and this none other than Captain Japhet himself. He lay awkwardly and his face so deadly pale that I came nearer, whereat he glanced up.

"What, Madam Will-o'-the-Wisp!" said he.

"You are wounded then!" said I, stooping nearer.

"Ma'm," he answered, "you tell me that of which I'm pretty well 'ware. Faith, I've been sure of it this half-hour, though 'tis no great matter as wounds go, and I made shift to bandage it aboard the galley."

"Yet it bleeds," said I, shuddering.

"Yet 'twill serve till Crabtree our surgeon yonder can tend it, for there be worse cases, alas!"

"Yet you are the Captain."

"And so—I wait."

"No!" said I. "For, since needs must, I will stay your bleeding."

"You?" says he with his odious smile.

"Come!" said I, frowning at him. "Aid me with your coat, lest I hurt you." So between us off came the coat, the which I folded and set beneath his head for pillow.

"Lord!" he murmured. "Now sink me,—can this be you?"

Instead of answering, I summoned a sailor who chanced near and bade him bring me water, and dispatched another hotfoot for bandages and lint from the surgeon's store. And when these were brought, I loosed the sodden bandage from Captain Japhet's arm and recoiled shuddering at what I saw.

"Alack and now will she languish!" says he in mocking voice. "What, Purdy man, stand by with that water lest the lady swoon."

"Mocking devil!" said I 'twixt shut teeth, and clapping a cold compress on his pulsing wound, was glad to see him wince. So having bathed thus and bandaged his hurt, "There, sir," quoth I, "spare me your unwanted thanks and get your most detested self to bed and out of my sight."

"Ma'm," says he, sitting up, "having saved my life upon a day, you must now cherish my hurts? Now what shall this portend, think ye?"

"Oh, get you to bed!" cried I and so left him. But when, reaching the poop, I looked back from this elevation, what should I see but this Captain fellow (and despite his wound) hard at work beside the busy surgeon and was minded to go back and proffer my assistance; but being all foredone by my late experiences, went on down into the cabin and finding my Deborah there, and all aflutter with anxiety, I suffered her to undress me and having bathed my smoke-grimed, weary body got me to bed. And lying there, aching yet content, whiles Deborah bustled softly to and fro, my mind must run upon this man that, so fierce in fight, could yet wait his turn with such patient humility and was even now labouring to the comfort of his men.

"Deborah," said I, "the world methinks is upside down."

"Lud, my dearie, and what'll you mean by that, I wonder?"

"Ay—what?" I murmured. "'Tis this that troubles me—what? Black can never be white, nor base lead pure gold, can it, Deborah?"

"No, never, ma'm."

"No, never!" I repeated, in ever-growing perplexity; maugre the which I presently fell very sweetly asleep.

CHAPTER XI

RELATETH THE ODIOS HOW AND WHEREFORE OF MY WEDDING

From this gentle slumber I woke up—starting and all of a tremble, to feel Deborah's arms about me, clasping me in such fervour of affright as set me a-quaking too, for many fists were pounding on the door and therewith came a babblement of hoarse and drunken voices.

"The women! Have forth the women! Us wants the women!"

"Where ... where is the knife?" I gasped, my teeth chattering.

"Alas, ma'm, I dropped the nasty thing overboard."

"Then God help us!" cried I in despair; then leaping from bed, I cast a robe about myself, looking wildly around for some way of escape from these ravensome, two-legged beasts, but finding none (and all the time the fists pounding and voices raving for us beyond the outer door), I sank upon my knees, striving to pray, yet my mind so filled with sick horror that I could scarce find words. Now as I cowered thus, half swooning with the suddenness of it all, I heard Deborah scream, but in such wild, glad relief that I glanced fearfully up and saw Captain Japhet looking down on me; and in this moment, forgetting all save my frantic, shameful dread of these raging monsters that clamoured beyond the outer door, I lifted my hands clasped to him in passionate supplication:

"Japhet!" cried I. "Captain Japhet, for pity's sake, let them not come at us ... let them not touch us—"

"Us?" he repeated. "So canst think o' thy woman in such hour!" So saying he barred the door and set his back against it while I crouched on my bed, all miserable aquake, with Deborah trembling beside me. And now, feeling myself something more secure, though the uproar yet continued, I began to beg and then demand (though very humbly) that he summon aid to our defence. "For there shame and death ravens for us!" gasped I, shuddering.

"Nay, merely Rum!" said he, in voice like a groan. "There Rum roareth and there's naught like rum can wake the devil aboard ship. Except for rum, yon noisy fellows be honest lads and right sailormen. And what's more, bold with rum, they do but demand their rights."

"What rights, in Heaven's name?" cried I.

"Ma'm," he answered with look so changed and sinister that all my natural suspicion of him returned with a fearful dismay, "according to the rules of our fellowship and my sworn oath as Captain, whatsoever falleth prey to us of the *Deliverance* must be shared, and these fellows, rum-beguiled, do look on you as plunder, as indeed you are, alas! Thus if I deny my pledge to them shall be bloody strife." Now here, though I alternate burned with contempt and hatred of him and chilled with dread, I dissembled all this and rising, faced him with my gentlest look and spake in tone very tenderly pleading:

"Captain Japhet, despite the cruel wrong you have done me, the hardships and perils you compel me to endure, there have been times when I thought to sense in you something of the honourable gentleman. Sir, it is to this, your nobler self, I now appeal for, sir, you will not, cannot, yield us up to such shameful horror.... Oh, Captain Japhet!" I gasped, hiding my face and forgetting alike all dignity of speech and bearing. "Save us! Forget your pledge! Fight for me ... for two defenceless women—" Here I sank crouching on my bed.

"Indeed and so I would," he answered, "were this your only means of salvation. Ay, though you've enough bloodshed and men's lives to your account as it is, I might turn this ship into the veriest shambles for your sake, were there none other way to protect ye. But there is another way and only one. I am here to propose an alternative by which your safety and Mrs. Deborah's may be assured without more bloodshed and never a soul of us harmed or anyways troubled—except myself. In fine, madam, you must instantly wed me."

Now here, my emotions transcending all mere words, I could but look at him and so eloquently that his pale cheek flushed and his aspect showed more sinister than ever.

"Faith," said he bitterly, "that I am compelled to shackle myself to wife so headstrong and infinite selfish is very

damnably distressing for myself, and yet better than the bloody and uncertain chance of battle; yet once we be wed, you are safe from all men aboard this ship."

"All?" I faltered. "You ... you mean?..."

"I mean all, ma'm, and in especial myself. For though, for your own sake I am thus compelled to marry you, pray know that whatsoever small inclination I may once have had to you is o' late clean gone, killed by your peevish arrogance; therefor you will understand here is to be no folly o' love betwixt us, no kisses, ma'm, no fond embracements. I give you the protection of my name; expect no more. This understood, let us get on with the sorry business. Ezekiel Penryn waits within hail to do our business; do I summon him? Ay or no?"

Up leapt I, shaken by such fury of indignation that yet for once I feared to utter; I therefore sank down again so shamed and dismayed beyond all relief of tears, a prey indeed to such violent conflict of emotions, that I yearned to scream and swoon but dared not, by reason of those monsters that still clamoured so brutishly for this poor, shivering creature that was me. And now, Deborah, mistaking the cause of my speechlessness, cast herself before me on her knees, weeping and beseeching of me to thus submit myself a sacrifice (as it were) to our common salvation, until at last in this distraction of mind and bodily weakness, I signified my assent. I heard the Captain whistle shrilly, heard a knock on the door that opening showed Mr. Penryn with old Lovepeace behind him.

And thus, whiles that horror of voices raved beyond the outer door, I stood supported by Deborah's arm while Master Penryn, very solemnly deliberate, proceeded with the ceremony of this most hateful marriage and I (thrilled like one in nightmare) murmured the responses submissively when he bade me. Little more do I remember until I found myself alone and Deborah's arms about me and her weeping voice in my ear.

"Oh, my blessed, lovely Innocent, to think as it should and must be so!" And I gazed down through tears of bitter humiliation at that which I must wear henceforth like badge of servitude, for on my 'spousal finger was the gleam of a much worn, very battered signet ring.

And thus dismally was I wed.

"Deborah," said I at last and passionately, "go you and bolt every door you may."

"Nay, but, dear heart, didn't he promise—"

"Nay, then, I will!" said I with shut teeth.

CHAPTER XII

TELLETH HOW WE FOUGHT YET ANOTHER SORT OF BATTLE

Howbeit this night we were nowise molested nor for two days did I see or hear aught of this my unwanted husband, either by reason of his wound or press of business, for the which I was sufficiently grateful; nor, when taking the air on deck and meeting Lovepeace or Mr. Penryn, would I suffer mention of his name, whereat they eyed me askance and would presently leave me to my unhappy reflections.

I was sitting thus three days after my miserable wedding, that is to say on July the fifth, writing into my journal with Deborah beside me plying her needle yet stealing sly glance where on the deck below the man Ben laboured with divers other men, repairing such of the gear as had been injured in the battle, when a shadow fell athwart the page and glancing up I looked into the gentle eyes of Mr. Barnabas, this right courtly gentleman.

"Madam," said he, "your husband, Captain Japhet, lieth sick."

"By your leave, sir," I answered, rising to acknowledge his bow, "we will call him Captain Japhet."

"As you will, madam; howbeit he languisheth of his wound."

"There is Mr. Crabtree the surgeon, sir."

"True enough," he sighed, "there is also myself, but Crabtree's skill and my care seem all unavailing."

"Is it his wound so irks him indeed, sir?"

"Nay, this mends apace, but daily he loseth strength."

"Then what ails the man?"

"'Tis what puzzles Crabtree and troubles me, madam. If you would but trouble to come and look at him ... will you, pray?"

Sighing, I rose (with no great willingness) and taking the arm Mr. Barnabas proffered, suffered him to lead me whither he would. Thus presently he brought me down into a little cabin so dark and airless that I exclaimed against it indignantly, and beholding him who lay there, stood dumbstruck to see him so altered, so thin and deadly pale and most woefully listless. Yet at sight of me his pallid lips curved to his quirking smile.

"Is't yourself, ma'm Ursula?" says he faintly; "here's vasty honour!... Had I known they should ha' shaved me."

"Mr. Barnabas tells me you are sick."

"Why then, you may curse Barnabas for chatterbox and go about your own concerns. Here's no place for you."

"He must be moved instantly," said I, turning to Mr. Barnabas.

"Ay, but whither, madam?" he enquired, eyeing me a little askance.

"Why, to the great cabin 'neath the poop, to my cabin. Deborah and I shall tend him." But at this Captain Japhet crieth out on me faint-voiced but mighty fierce:

"No! Damme, but I'll bide where I am."

"He will have light and air in the great cabin—Mr. Barnabas—"

"But I shall have peace and quiet here," quoth the Captain, excessive peevish, "no fine-lady airs or shrewish tongue—"

"The poor creature shows a little feverish," said I, setting the tips of my fingers to his scowling brow, "so let him be borne well lapped in blankets."

"And I say I'll bide here!" cried he, feebly ferocious.

"There, there!" said I, patting his bristly cheek. "Mr. Barnabas and I know what is best for you. Blankets, Mr. Barnabas, and mayhap a hot brick to his feet; ask Mr. Crabtree. Meanwhile I go prepare against his coming." And away I went, yet pausing in the alley without, heard him swearing roundly at Mr. Barnabas, thus:

"Here was a scurvy trick, Barnaby, a devilish ill turn, shipmate, to suffer yon hoity-toity, fleering madam to spy me in my weakness, and my phiz all cursed bristles, damme! And I'll not go to endure her reproachful looks and coals of fire, d'ye hear—"

How all this filled me with such a complacent satisfaction that as I went my way, my mind full of schemes for tempering his odious self-assurance and schooling his arrogance to a proper humility and perchance remorse, I found I was singing to myself and what should I sing but his own fool song and the words these:

"Black Bartlemy 'twas hung him
To the mainyard swayed and swung him
With a yo heave ho
And a rumbleow
But a jolly stave we sung him
With a ho and a heave yo ho."

Reaching the great cabin, I summoned Deborah and she instantly all of a twitter to know the Captain must lie there, yet very quick and deft preparing for him. Thus very presently, all being ready and our sick man not yet arrived, I bade Deborah order my wind-blown hair and change me into my second-best gown (we had brought but four, alas); but this showing something too fine for a sick chamber, I donned one of Deborah's prettiest aprons. This done and our invalid yet tarrying, I was about to go to insist they remove him from his den, will he, nill he, when was shuffle of footsteps and in came Mr. Barnabas with four sturdy fellows (and one of them comely Ben), bearing their Captain on a pallet, who muttered and growled in very surly fashion from very mountain of blankets, etc.; and when the mariner had saluted and tramped away (and he still muttering thus), cried I, very innocently tender:

"Oh, Mr. Barnabas, doth the poor wretch suffer pain that he so waileth?" Now at this Captain Japhet propped himself feebly on an elbow the better to glare at me while behind his back Mr. Barnabas smiled, answering:

"Chiefly in his temper, madam, as I guess. For I've brought him hither against his orders."

"Orders?" I repeated like one astonished. "But a sick man cannot give orders. Henceforth you should be Captain, for he is at present no more than our poor invalid."

"'S heart!" exclaimed Barnabas, his boyish smile broadening. "How sayst thou to this, Japhet, old lad?"

"Ay, ay," he sighed very meekly, "this ship is in your charge, Barnaby, till I'm up and about again."

"And now lie you down," said I with compelling gentleness. "This pillow 'neath your poor, aching head—come!" He obeyed with the same unwonted humility though his eyes were fiercely rebellious and:

"My head doth nowise ache, ma'm!" he muttered sullenly.

"Then compose yourself or it surely will anon. And now as to his diet, Mr. Barnabas," said I, smoothing my apron; "it should be plain, of course, a little thin water gruel—" Here the Captain snarled so ferociously that Deborah actually jumped while Barnabas burst out laughing.

"Faith, Japhet!" he chuckled. "I leave thee in such sternly capable hands, 'tis mighty relief to my anxieties."

"Why, then, sir," said I, patting our sick man's pillow (whereat he flinched), "when you go, pray ask Mr. Crabtree hither to confer with me how best to feed this poor soul."

"Madam Ursula," said he, taking my hand and kissing it very tenderly, "God bless thee! Be firm as you seem and cow your invalid back to health. I'll send you Crabtree very presently." So saying, away he went, with his long, nimble stride.

"So, ma'm," said the Captain, so soon as door had shut, "you've been new-tiring that red hair of yours; surely not for the sick eyes o' poor Japhet."

"Lord, no, sir," I answered, sitting down to my journal and taking up quill, "merely to keep it out of my own."

"'Tis an evil colour, red, ma'm, a fierce, savage, fighting colour, and irks my sight—"

"Then close your poor eyes," I answered, forcing myself to a meekness very near divine, "try to sleep and dream my irksome red is gentle auburn. Shall I stroke that aching head and soothe thee to sleep?"

"Ay, do!" he laughed but with such look as set my cheeks aflame, wherefore I stooped to my journal. "Ha! mock modesty," he jeered, "and I so weak!" Here I began to write but so passionately that I dropped a blot and yearned to fling the book at him but went on writing instead.

"What is it your pen so squeaketh of, ma'm?" he enquired.

"Indeed, sir," I answered in small, gentle voice, "it is some account of the dire tribulations brought on me by a singular cruel person to wit, Japhet Bly."

"Then, ma'm, pray God they be no greater."

"Amen!" I murmured fervently. "Though what more of humiliation I could know passeth my understanding." And lifting my left hand, I shuddered at the battered thing that gleamed there.

"Ah, ma'm," said he grimly, "I do confess it showeth but poorly there, yet it serves well enough. It hath seen much and long usage. I bore yon ring with me through hell because it was once my mother's."

"I can scarce believe you ever knew a gentle mother's love, Captain Bly."

"I never did, she died so very young." Here I started to a sharp rapping on the door that opened to admit Mr. Crabtree, the ship's chirurgeon, a little quick man all wig and coat skirts, with a small, lined face, the more sinister for the black patch he wore in place of his left eye, and yet a mannerly person and well spoken and as it proved right able in his profession.

"Good day, mem!" said he, saluting me with a bob of wig and swirl of coat skirts, and glancing about with his one eye that seemed to see so much. "This is very well. I ordered him brought here days ago ... refused! Head-strong fellow very and, save your presence, mem, a dem'd perverse, impatient patient into the bargain."

"I have already remarked it, sir," said I. "How is he now?"

"Dem'd contrary, mem, saving your grace! We've reduced our inflammation but our fever little abates, we gain no strength, we languish, for, 'sbud, mem, we refuse t' eat and we must eat t' give Nature a chance, demme."

"Should he not be bled, sir?"

"Step me vitals—no, mem! 'Tis blood we lack! There's more fine lads killed by the dem'd lancet than all y'er rapiers and small swords, b'ged!"

"Now Mr. Crabtree, as to feeding him,—slops, I suppose and—"

"Ay, soup, mem, with fish boiled—and a snack o' meat by degrees increasing."

"And for drink, barley water, Mr. Crabtree?"

"Ay, mem, if such could be had aboardship; failing the which we must take wine well tempered with water."

"Must he be tended night and day, sir?"

"No, mem, no—except our fever increase, which God forbid."

"And now," growled the Captain, "I humbly beseech you'll suffer me a word."

"An' you will, sir, and what then?"

"This, and mark me, Crabtree! I say once for all I'll not be caged here to be clucked over as I were some rousy chicken

or plaguey fowl, d'ye hear?"

"Ay, I hear," nodded the little doctor grimly, "and now hear you me, sir—except you have air and light and proper nursing, we shall be heaving ye overboard in shotted hammock pretty soon, ay so, demme! Japhet, you're a stout captain, a prime sailorman, a good friend, but a fond and feckless fool, and there's for ye, Captain and sir! Here y'are now and here ye'll bide for all y'r curst pigheadedness. As for you, Mem Ursula, keep an eye on the fool fellow lest he take a chill. Should he prove anyways obstreperous, send for me and I'll tie him abed or post two stout fellows to hold him,—ay, I will so, Japhet, or demme! I'll drop in, mem, from time to time, though I'm a busy man these days."

"How are your poor wounded sailors, sir?"

"Famous, mem, famous! One amputation—leg. Three extractions—balls and splinters, four dead.... Famous, eh, mem?"

"Yes, I ... suppose so," I murmured, thinking of the four dead, as with swirl of coat skirts the little surgeon turned and sped away.

"Pon my soul!" exclaimed the Captain suddenly, glaring up at me under drawn brows, "you show mighty complacent, ma'am. I haven't seen you look so pleased since you came aboard; is it thus my weakness affects you?"

"Nay, sir," I answered gently, "think rather that I bear my cruel wrongs with what philosophy I may. I am one groweth more resolute and strong in adversity."

"Ay and myself weak as any kitten!" he snarled.

"Though much less playful," sighed I. "But indeed, I've heard tell that most men be peevish and impatient in sickness, lacking the sweetly patient fortitude of women. Men suffer and swear, women endure in a self-effacing silence."

"I know woman can swear right lustily!" he sneered.

"Alas!" sighed I. "Even the best, the noblest and sweetest of women is but human—"

"Especially if she grow red hair," he added, whereat I turned my back on the peevish wretch and signalling to Deborah where she sat sewing, I set him in her care and seating myself at the table with great show of aloofness and abstraction, bent to work upon my journal; but I had scarce writ a word when he breaks out into his song of Yo-ho, but presently stops for lack of breath; and then in voice suddenly loud:

"Ursula, ho, damme, can't ye talk to me—won't, hey?"

"Willingly," I answered, laying down my pen. "You see me at your service."

"You're not—you're not!" cried he in voice high and querulous. "You're not, I say, and never shall be, except you plead and sue and supplicate, for Japhet's a proud fool ... a fool, ay, and damned in his folly, being dead and forgot and yet would live again ... and must wed him a wife and such a wife,—ha, folly! Waiting for the wind o' Fortune to waft him to safe anchorage at last ... to secure haven, the harbour o' Blissful Content. Better they had murdered me young ... or I'd died ... drowned ... hanged ... killed in fight ... and so, blessedly dead!"

Rising hastily, I went to him and perceiving his eyes so wildly bright and cheek so flushed, saw the fever was increased in him to such degree that I bade Deborah go instantly for Mr. Crabtree.

And now with voice and hand I strove to soothe him as best I might, only to have him seize my hand, crushing it in such grip I might hardly endure.

"So there y' are, ma'm," said he with fierce laugh. "Hale and strong, and here lie I foredone, a sheer hulk all adrift to be wrecked on the shoals of Hell's Delight. No joy in life for poor Japhet! See, there he stands,—a desolate child, a lonely boy, a tortured youth ... a vengeful man that being dead yet liveth.... And now he's gone adrift ... all tangled in red hair!"

Here all strength seemed to leave him for he dropped my numbed hand to sink back and lie mute and trembling, his eyes closed in weariness, and I noticed how long and thick were his lashes. But as I viewed him thus in his weakness, from beneath these lashes something sparkled and fell, though his haggard face showed grimly set as ever: and yet this falling tear moved me strangely. I caught my breath and touched his hair and burning forehead with a new, shy tenderness, and

so was pity born. And suddenly, as he had sensed this in my touch, he opened his eyes and frowned up at me.

"This cursed weakness!" he exclaimed, and then in harsher tone, "Madam, I seek no pity of you."

"Nay but," I answered meekly, "how shall I not pity you?"

"By remembering I am your husband," he answered bitterly, "this should serve." As indeed it did, for I flinched and drew away.

"You are ungracious!" said I and could have wept, yet would not.

"And what are you?" he retorted. "You that wed me for no reason but love of yourself ... the saving of that so precious body! Well, you may keep it for all o' me. I'll none of it, husband or no ... for I am Japhet ... Japhet o' the *Deliverance* ... to sail and fight, an outcast to the end, for my witness is dead ... no proof with a curse! No home, no rest for me ... I must sail and fight ... but for ever sail on like the Flying Dutchman, damned Vanderdecken, till I rot...."

And now he brake out (and louder than ever) singing his song of Yo-Ho, in the midst of which, and to my relief, came Mr. Crabtree.

"This is not so well!" quoth the little doctor, viewing our sick man with his solitary bright eye. "No, not so well, or demme! Yet our fever must run its course, we must be worse ere we are better. We must be patient, we must be watchful...."

Of the many weary hours that followed I can write but little for they seem to me now more like terror of nightmare and the records in my journal be but brief scribblings. But as his sickness increased upon him, there grew a sure and certain knowledge within me that not all the little surgeon's art or medicaments might save him, but that I alone stood 'twixt this man Japhet and the death he seemed to crave for, and that except I watched over him and stayed near him, waking and asleep, he must surely die; and this of itself wrought in me such fervour of devotion that (maugre my hatred of him) I tended him as my own life (nay very salvation) depended on his living, so that I could never endure to leave him, scarce even to sleep or taste the sunny air on deck. And this led to such misconceptions as irritated me well-nigh beyond bearing, as when Ezekiel Penryn and old Lovepeace would come creeping a-tiptoe to peer at our invalid, since Lovepeace (whispering) must vow there never was spouse more gentle, more sweet and loving than myself; and Ezekiel, lifting hands aloft, must murmur blessings on my tender wifely solicitude. Even Mr. Barnabas, this kindly gentleman, must in his turn mortify me thus: for meeting me as I stepped out on deck for breath of air,

"Mistress Ursula," saith he, drawing my hand within his great arm to steady me, since the ship was rolling somewhat before a sweet, fresh wind, "our Japhet is mighty fortunate to have won the love and devotion of such wife,—for," he continued hastily and before I might find adequate retort, "your husband hath known little of joy and less of gentleness in his life hitherto."

"Nay, sir," I answered, mighty troubled, "dear Mr. Barnabas, I would not have you thus deluded. I do not love your Captain Japhet; nay, indeed, truth bids me declare I hate him, as is but natural when you consider—" here I stopped, for Mr. Barnabas was smiling down at me, yet when he spoke his gentle voice seemed very reverent.

"Would God we might all find such hatred! And since Japhet is my loved friend, pray let me be yours ... call me Barnabas. Now as to Japhet, he is direly ill, indeed Crabtree tells me he is very nigh to death—"

"Said he so indeed?" quoth I, halting in quick panic.

"Ay, verily, Crabtree saith he would be dead now but for you and that die he must except your love (or hatred) can win him to make a fight for his life. Thus you may hold death at bay, since Japhet, thinking he hath naught to live for, is very ready to be done with life. Well, if he die, I lose my best friend and you a husband, ay, such man whose like you shall never find again—"

But, waiting for no more, down sped I into the cabin, to behold Deborah struggling to keep him in bed, and he crying out that I was strangling him with my red hair; and yet at my touch he checked his delirious outcries and, suffering me to lay him back, very presently seemed to fall asleep....

Thus daily and nightly I watched him (though Deborah did all she might), but, driven and harassed by this tormenting

belief that I was responsible for his living or dying, my respites were few and I dared take little rest.... There were hours when he lay motionless and scarce breathing ... one dreadful moment when I thought him dead and sent Deborah or Ben running for Crabtree.

There were times when in his fierce delirium he would have leapt from bed and I alone, or with my good Deborah, must strive desperately to hold him down until the paroxysm was over. There were times, too, when he shouted and sang or raved of storm and tempest or fury of battle ... sometimes he would voice dreadful oaths and imprecations with words I scarce dare guess at. He talked of brutal floggings, of prison and sick men a-dying ... of fierce dogs that hunted him, of swamps and great mountains and of the pangs of thirst and hunger. Anon he would rave in Spanish or French and then again cry out of bitter wrongs and bloody vengeance, of death and a lonely grave—a wild, rushing farrago of words that yet conjured to my mind pictures of such dreadful doings and cruel sufferings that more than once I must needs weep for the poor distraught soul.... So came a night, near dawn, and he so weak and languishing that, Deborah being asleep in the smaller cabin, I called Ben to fetch Crabtree, who presently appeared in his nightcap and half-clad to bend above the patient and question me anxiously:

"Hath he been conscious o' late, mem?"

"Once or twice for but a moment or so." Here Mr. Crabtree was silent so long that in turn I questioned him at last.

"What is it? Oh, what now? Is he worse?"

"Mrs. Ursula," he answered, scanning me with his one eye and his look very troubled, "you are worn out. Get you to bed. I'll watch in your place. Get you some sleep, for we can do no more for him, no, demme—not even you! It lacketh but an hour to dawn; if he can live till then, he may weather it, but—"

"Why, then, die he shall not!" said I dully. "So go you, sir; leave me alone with him till it be dawn."

Mr. Crabtree blinked his one eye at me, sighed dismally and went softly away; and I, bowing my weary head between weary hands, praying that God would suffer this my unloved, unwanted husband to live.

And then, faint whispering, my sick man spoke:

"Ursula, 'twould seem ... I am to bid thee Farewell. Here our ways divide ... my course is run, thank God... this fevered dream endeth.... I'm drifting ... out—"

"No!" cried I, upstarting from my chair. "You shall not die, Japhet!"

"Ay but ... I shall!" he gasped. "None can let or stay me ... much less my ... so loving wife—" Now here, seeing how he looked up at me with ghost of his old quirkish smile, tears blinded me.

"Thy wife?" I repeated. "Ah, but she will!" And then my arms were fast about him and, prone upon him thus, I bade death from him: I called on him to live, kissing his brow, his eyes, his unresponsive lips, striving to breathe into his failing body some of my own quick vitality, praying speechlessly the while. How long I clasped him thus, supplicating God and striving, as it were, face to face with death, I know not, but presently he sighed, murmuring my name and, pillowing his head against me like weary child, closed his eyes and sighing, fell asleep; then I, not daring to stir lest I wake him, laid my head on his pillow and lulled by his deep, slow breathing and the inward assurance that my prayer was answered, I too fell to deep, refreshing slumber.

And it was thus that Mr. Crabtree, stealing hither in the dawn, found us.

"For all the world," said he afterwards (and to my great confusion), "sleeping like two babes and your two arms fast about him, my dear mem, as you had plucked him to your heart from the very claws o' death, as I do protest ye did in very truth, or demme!"

CHAPTER XIII

SHOWETH SOMETHING OF CAPTAIN JAPHET HIS BUSINESS AND MY JUST ANGER THEREFOR

Within the week he was up and about again, yet so marvellous changed, both in look and manner, it verily seemed that one Captain Japhet had died and in his stead another had been born,—a gentleman this of such grace of speech and bearing as put me to no small wonderment; moreover, in his every look and tone I sensed a new respect for me and therewith a sincerity that touched me not a little and waked in me sentiments all undreamed.

Insomuch that Deborah became so daring she began to twit me and I actually caught myself blushing very fool like. As thus:

"La, ma'm, how fine you are this morning!" or "Lud, madam, I protest you were never so handsome and your sweet eyes so bright, and no wonder, for he grows such stately gentleman these days and handsome as thy dear self!" Until on a sunny day having seen me walking with him (and the weather so fair), "Oh, my own precious lady," says she, embracing me so soon as I entered the cabin to her, "to see you so gay and light-hearted again makes me happy too ... only I be considering when you'll take him within tender arms and be truly his—"

"Woman!" I gasped. "Be silent, thou creature, hold that naughty tongue ... out o' my sight, thou saucy jade, lest I box those ears!" Whereat she moaned and fled from me to the inner cabin, there to lament and weep; whiles I stood wondering to find myself so mightily enraged.

After this I determined to see him less often and the weather growing boisterous gave me excuse for going less frequently on deck; moreover, as his strength increased, he took over command from Barnabas and was thus busied in the thousand and one concerns of the ship. Then also about this time I noticed an unwonted stir; men laughed and sang and seemed for ever clambering up the rigging to peer round about the wide ocean and hail the look-out man, who it seemed passed his time perched dizzily atop the mainmast; and once I heard Japhet cry:

"Ten guineas for the lad first sights her."

Thus chancing upon Lovepeace and Ezekiel tramping side by side as was their wont, I beckoned them.

"Sirs," said I, "what ship do we look for?"

"A stout ship named the *Lion*, my dear," answered Lovepeace, drawing my right hand within his arm.

"Oh, an English ship?" I enquired eagerly.

"Ay, from trucks to keelson, Ursula," answered Ezekiel, possessing himself of my left hand.

"And why do we seek her?"

"Well," answered old Lovepeace, shaking his white head, "that is Japhet's business."

"Must I then ask him?"

"Nay, we can tell thee this, child," said Ezekiel, patting my hand in his fatherly way, "there is one aboard this *Lion* ship that Japhet hath set his heart on."

"A woman?" I questioned.

"No, no, lass," quoth Lovepeace, scowling; "'tis a man and by all accounts a very Amalekite, a son of Beelzebub and therefore damned."

"And for why should he want such man on his ship?"

"This you may ask o' Japhet, an' ye will, for yonder he cometh," answered Lovepeace. Turning about, I saw him approaching, and very comely from bewigged head to buckled shoes; and now, even as his hand came out for mine, a voice hailed high above us:

"Sail ho!"

"Where away?" roared Lovepeace.

"Larboard bow ... three points, sir!"

"Bid all hands make sail!" says Captain Japhet. The which command Lovepeace roared forthwith and instantly all was cheery bustle; and great wonder was it to see these men (of whom I had come to know many by sight and name) run so nimbly up the rigging to loose out the great sails, calling out cheerily to be answered as cheerily from the decks below.

And presently, looking whither so many other eyes looked, I saw the cause for all this bustle and to-do,—the far, faint glint of a sail that grew slowly upon my sight until little by little the ship herself rose in plain view while our own vessel, heeling under her mighty spread of sails, drove furiously towards her through foaming sea that hissed astern of us, until, chancing to glance from far-distant ship to Captain Japhet perched high in the rigging above me, I saw him shut his perspective glass and heard his cheery voice shouting divers orders anent braces, top-gallant sheets, halyards and the like, so that our ship *Deliverance* was soon upon her old course again, or so I judged. And presently finding him beside me:

"Pray tell me," said I, "what ship you seek and why?"

"Not yon," he answered; "the vessel I would lay aboard is larger."

"Ay, but why must you lay aboard on any ship?"

At this he laughed merrily and taking my hand, kissed it ere I knew. "I love to hear thee talk sailorly—or so nearly so," said he, soft-voiced. "And I would come up with this ship to pay a debt long overdue. Oh, faith, 'tis joy to the eyes to see you sway to a heaving deck like seasoned mariner; you've such admirable sea legs, you should have sea-wise head also. Look now, and I'll explain something of a ship. The right side we call starboard, the left larboard. Here where we stand is the poop that leadeth yonder to the quarter-deck that is a ship's holy of holies. Below there is the waist and beyond the forecastle. This mast here is the mizzen, the next the main and t' other the foremast. And these masts are each three in one, as mast, topmast and topgallant—"

"Nay, a mercy's sake," I laughed, "my poor head's all bemused. If I'm to learn, as well I may, I will ask and you shall answer. For instance, that tall pole yonder?"

"We call it the ensign staff."

"And these great black ropes?"

"These are backstays tarred against the weather and to be eased off or haled alunto as required."

Thus as the swift hours sped I grew to verily love this noble ship *Joyful Deliverance* and took pains to learn something of the wonder of her and other sea lore from Captain Japhet or any willing to instruct me (and these very many). And ever this strangely wed husband of mine became more endurable so that I know not how matters perchance might have ended but for a discovery I made that reawakened all my old animosity against him, nay, fired me with such passionate resentment, such fierce contempt that (as it were) reared a mighty barrier betwixt us the which I determined he never should surmount or I break down. And the cruel reason for it all, was this.

I had of late permitted my Deborah (with Captain Japhet's permission) to take her sewing down into the waist of the ship and sit with her adoring Ben for half an hour or so towards evening, when the broad deck showed deserted. Now this corner where they would sit was by a little window that opened into my great cabin and often, as I was busied with my needle or writing into my journal, I would hear the pleasant murmur of their familiar, Sussex voices,—even as now; but of a sudden my hurrying pen was arrested by mention of my own name in Ben's chuckling voice and thereafter I heard Deborah catch her breath and fall a-giggling. Instantly I arose and coming to this open window stood listening.

"Then ... oh, then," said Deborah, between her foolish giggles, "they wasn't all ravensome monsters a-clawing after our two poor shiversome bodies."

"Nary a one on 'em, lass! We was all on us the Cap'n's picked men as ha' sailed wi' un since we took this stout ship, comrades sworn and true, lass, as be ever alongside his honour, come battle or storm ... Lord love ee, there couldn't

never be such mutinous riot on no ship commanded by Cap'n Japhet and you can lay to that! No, his best men were we and ecod, Deb, 'twas me as roared and battered and sang out loudest. And it worked; Lord love me, your fine lady, for all her pride, sings out for quarters mighty quick, and now drownd me if they bean't a billing like two turtle doves ... warms me very 'eart it do, lass, and minds me how you and me might do likewise."

And now, my tenderest sentiments thus brutally outraged, in passion of grief, anger and shame, I dashed down the quill I chanced to be yet holding and away I sped to confront the monster who could thus wantonly terrify a poor, trembling woman to his own stealthy and base purposes.

Coming on deck, almost the first man I saw was this most inhuman wretch and very smiling and debonair. But meeting the flashing scorn of my expressive eyes, his smile quickly faded and he halted in his advance and stood to regard me (I was glad to see) with a very evident apprehension. As well indeed he might!

"Captain Japhet Bly," I said, low-voiced and yet in tone sufficiently arresting, "think black shame on yourself!"

"Being such as I am," he answered gently, "I have done so now and then; but wherefore now, Ursula, pray why?"

"Why?" I repeated; and now, while my eyes scorched and seared the calloused soul of him (or so I hoped), my tongue did its endeavour so ably and to such bitter purpose as seemed to touch him to the very quick, for his grey eyes wavered from mine and for a moment he bowed his head, showing thus very different from the stately gentleman of a moment since.

"To have so basely deceived me!" said I, 'twixt gnashing teeth, "to have terrified me so vilely into this viler marriage! Oh, would I had some man to avenge me on you, Captain Japhet ... you that have made me such poor deluded creature for your whole ship's company to chuckle and fleer at in corners."

"So?" he murmured, raising his head and I saw his lips uncurling in his hateful, sneering smile and his voice was changed to its odious drawl. "Your pride goeth limping again, eh, ma'm! And how should you be so mighty assured of this—"

"Do not shame yourself by denial, sir."

"No, ma'm, I won't, since 'tis very truth. But how should you know it?"

"I heard but now."

"Whom did you hear?"

"Your fine man Ben. Howbeit, sir, for this last cruel affront, I hate you most completely and never, never will I forgive it you."

"And you said 'never' twice, ma'm!" he sighed as, turning my back on him, I hastened below.

How long I sat staring blankly at the unfinished page of my journal I know not, but suddenly with rush and flutter of petticoats, came Deborah to cast herself before me on her knees and with great eyes aswim in tears.

"Oh, Mistress ... dear Mis' Ursula," she gasped, "they ha' took poor Ben, they ha' dragged away my Ben! They ha' tied my Ben ... all tied up he be, arm and leg and no shirt! And the whip! Oh, ma'm, they be a-going for to lash my poor Ben's life out!"

"What for?" said I, though guessing and dreading the reason.

"Oh, dearie, I dunnot know.... But save him ... oh, for dear God's blessed sake, save my Ben."

Up rose I, my hands clenched and teeth set, up to the deck and down the starboard poop ladder; along the waist sped I until, beyond the mainmast and nigh amidships, I beheld the wretched Ben tied arm and leg and his brawny back bare and a hairy fellow who flourished a many-thonged whip.

"Stop!" cried I, and pushing my way through the gaping mariners (who made way for me very readily), I snatched angrily at the cruel whip.

"Give me this!" I commanded, whereat the hairy man instantly obeyed and fell back a step, goggling at me and gaping in speechless amaze.

"Now loose this man, instantly."

"But lady ..." quoth the hairy man, and turned in helpless fashion to stare from me to where Captain Japhet stood. "How of it, Cap'n?" he enquired hoarsely.

"Ay, ay, Jerry, take your orders," laughed the Captain, "cut him loose. Sink me, 'twould seem I'm not longer captain of my own ship." And away he strode and Lovepeace and Ezekiel with him, while poor Ben's comrades freed him and all very mum. And now, to my amazement, this man Ben, instead of deafening me with incoherent thanks, stood mute as his fellows, his head adroop, the very picture of woeful misery.

"There, Ben," said I, tossing the heavy whip at his feet, "you are free!"

"Ay, ma'm," he muttered humbly, "thanks to you, m' lady. I know as you meant well, but you freed me agin orders, which don't nowise seem nat'ral like nohow, nor yet right. So if 'tis all the same to ee, ma'm, I'd rayther be tied up again all reg'lar and shipshape and take my half-dozen according to orders, thanking you kindly, ma'm, I'm sure. Seize me up again, shipmates!" But presently, seeing no man heeded him, Ben threw his jacket about his nakedness and trudged heavily away, a very woeful, much dejected man indeed.

And so back went I, revolving in my troubled mind what strange, perverse creatures these male things called men truly are.

And here I would record that this day I saw abundance of flying fish, to my great wonder.

CHAPTER XIV

TELLETH HOW I CAME TO A VENGEFUL RESOLUTION, AND WHEREFORE

This day at eight o'clock in the morning being Thursday the thirtieth of July, we sighted land which I learned was called the Cape de Verde. And now what joy to behold after all these weary leagues of ocean!

It was as I leaned me across the high, carven bulwark, feasting my eyes on this glad sight, that Ezekiel Penryn, being officer of the watch, came to lean beside me.

"Yonder," said he, pointing, "is Saint Vincent's Isle, Ursula."

"You have seen all this before, then, Mr. Ezekiel?"

"Ay, many times," he nodded.

"Then prithee tell me of it," said I, my yearning eyes upon the sweet greeny slopes that with distance showed so much like my own so loved South Downs.

"Well, child, it lieth in the latitude of sixteen degrees fifty and five minutes and twenty-five degrees thirty-six minutes longitude from the meridian of London. And what d'ye think of that?" he demanded, his sombre eyes twinkling with an unsuspected humour.

"That you plunge me fathoms deep beyond my poor understanding," I retorted. "Tell me of this island, what like it is ... would I might go a-walking there."

"Ay, but not in the woods there, child, for mid those same trees, you shall find multitudes of great spiders—ay, big as a walnut and their webs mighty difficult to get through, being strong as ordinary thread and vastly many. But here too is great plenty of guinea hens, with hogs and goats and never a soul beside. These islands be eleven in number and named Cape Verde of the Green Cape, because they be of the promontory o' that name on the African shore and belong to the crown of Portugal, and their names St. Vincent, St. Anthony, St. Lucy, St. Nicholas, Sal, Bona Vista, Mayo, Santiago, Fogo, Romes and Brava. And there's for thee!"

"You know them passing well."

"I should do," he answered grimly, "I've seen 'em often enough, God knoweth! And the first time that ever I sighted them I was nigh wrecked on yonder point and prayed God I might drown and end my misery, for this was seventeen weary years agone."

"And pray, Ezekiel, what was your misery?"

"A breaking heart, child,—sickness o' mind and body ... for I was a shackled bondsman, being shipped from all that I loved to a very hell on earth of shame and suffering."

"My poor Ezekiel!" I murmured, and taking his bony hand to fondle it and comfort him, saw 'neath laced ruffle much the same jagged scar I had noticed so often on the wrist of Captain Japhet. "Ah, you also have rowed aboard a slave ship then?" I questioned.

"That amid other torments!" he answered bitterly.

"And why—wherefore should they use thee so, Ezekiel, my dear?" And speaking, I raised this poor, scarred hand to my cheek, caressing it thus for very sympathy; and when, finding him silent I looked at him, I beheld his stern, lined face grown marvellous gentle and his deep-set eyes bright with tears.

"My dear," he murmured. "My child ..." And so we stood dumb awhile. At last: "Oh, child," says he gently, "thy tender sympathy wakes memories ... home, a wife, children, yet indeed I am nothing singular in my tribulations; there are my good comrades ... all men o' suffering, child. There is Lovepeace Farrance, Sir Barnabas, Japhet, Absalom Troy, ay, and many beside, so if you can so pity this my grimly self—pity these likewise."

"And why did you suffer such evil?"

"I marched out for Monmouth and the Protestant Cause, Ursula. You know the tale of Sedgemoor Fight and the Bloody Assize. I and others, alas, were sold away slaves to the plantations."

"And Captain Japhet—was he too at Sedgemoor?"

"Nay, child, he was too young ... even Barnabas, that fought at Sedgemoor, was but a lad. By what accursed villainy Japhet came among us wretched slaves I know not, for of himself he speaketh seldom, but 'twas he schemed our final salvation ... 'twas he fired us with the desperate purpose of winning us a ship, and so we did, a stout Spanish vessel she was, and we no more than three and twenty ragged, ill-armed wretches. And so we won free, yet all of us Ishmaels, men to be taken or slain by any that could, homeless, friendless, of no country, our very names forgot and naught in the world save our comradeship and faith in each other. Thus we that suffered took oath to smite for such like sufferers henceforth—wherefore our ensign o' the Broken Shackle.... And thus it is that Japhet is our Captain, his will ours and ours his." After this, we were silent awhile, I staring down at this hard-used hand I still held warm between my own and he (as I knew) looking down on me.

"You think marvellous well of him," said I at last, "your Captain Japhet."

"Ay, I do!" he answered simply.

"Yet he is bitter, lawless man and fierce."

"So are we all, child, and I think with reason. For there is never a man aboard but hath suffered wrong and cruelty. And as for Japhet ... if you could find in your heart to show him such gentle sympathy as you have now for me—"

"No, Ezekiel," says I, kissing his hand ere he might prevent, "you are, as I do think now, a noble martyr, but he—your cruel Japhet ... oh, dost not see, Ezekiel? Even as you were reft from our dear England and all that you so loved,—even thus hath he snatched poor me, plunging me into hardship unimagined and all manner of peril, and lately hath ... by basely ignoble deception, forced me into most detested marriage."

"But, child, this was by your own free will."

"'Twas by the wickedest guile and most abominable chicane!" cried I so passionately that Ezekiel recoiled in amaze and then as we thus fronted each other, I heard the Captain's sleepy, hated voice:

"How now, Zeke; hast thou too offended Her High Mightiness? Fie, Zeke, fie! Speak me his knavery, ma'm, and we'll ha' the rogue to court-martial, or should I say marine?" But turning my back on him, said I to Ezekiel:

"Mr. Penryn, will you be so obliging to ask your Captain to relieve me of his presence or I must go." Now at this, my good Ezekiel was dumb and looked so unhappy that I was sorry for him and the Captain chuckled.

"Ay, ay, ma'm! Though this is my own quarter-deck and you but here by my grace, your will commands; lo, most domineering, majestic ma'm, I obey!" And off he went and presently after him Penryn and not a word. So I came to the chair set for me hard beside the mizzen and there seated grew very pensive till, roused by Absalom Troy's silver pipe, I looked up to see the ship all a-bustle, where men pulled and hove on ropes with a mighty "heave and yo-ho-ing" and I saw the great yards swung round (or I should say aback) till the sails shivered; then down came headsails and the *Deliverance* slowed her pace (or to speak sailorly "lost way") until she seemed almost still; then down plunged the anchor and we stopped altogether (or "brought up"). Presently was more yo-ho-ing and I saw they were heaving out our largest boat, which I think is called "pinnacle"; scarce was this in the water than down into it clambered divers men, twenty I counted and all of them armed, whiles Captain Japhet stood in corner to converse with Penryn, old Lovepeace, Barnabas and other officers. Then down he clammers too, the men aboard give a cheer answered cheerily by those in the boat, the sail is hoisted and away they go towards this island called Saint Vincent; and I so curious as to their purpose that, espying Lovepeace in the waist, I hailed him to know.

"Well, Ursula," he answered, climbing the larboard poop ladder whereby I stood. "'Tis in concern o' Japhet's that is therefore concern of us all, and this to learn if certain personage he seeketh be come hither or no."

"And why are they so heavily armed, Lovepeace?"

"Armed!" says he, opening his eyes at me. "Lord, child, us do go ever armed on such like occasions."

"Do they expect ... fighting?"

"Well, Ursula, this is as the good Lord seeth fit; howbeit our larboard ports be up, triced as you'll notice, and guns double shotted agin the possibility."

"Do you go ever in expectation of battle and bloodshed?" quoth I bitterly.

"Ay, we do so, the Lord be praised! We lay sickle to corn and axe to root whenso we may ... and there be Absalom Troy a-wafting me," and away went Lovepeace, this kindly yet so ferocious old man that was so very inaptly named. And after some while, I went down into the cabin to find Deb busy as ever and singing happy as any bird and I so cross-grained I chid her instantly to silence and sat down to write into my journal.

But this proving very wearisome, I turned instead to aid Deborah in the mending and darning of my poor, hard used, weary garments: the which becoming more wearisome, I tossed work aside and lying down on the settee was so fortunate to fall asleep.

I awakened suddenly to a prodigious trampling of feet overhead and finding Deborah gone, I rose and went up on deck. And almost the first thing I saw was the pinnace coming back and at speed, for beside the sail the mariners in her were plying their oars, and as it came nearer, I could see Captain Japhet standing in the stern sheets, gesturing with his arm. And then, as if in answer, I heard Ezekiel Penryn's melodious, bell-like shout:

"At the windlass, stand by! Man the braces and square away!" And now, as I watched in no little trepidation by reason of all this, from behind a green headland crept a tall and stately ship. As I watched this distant, lovely thing, from her side belched smoke and flame and a cannon ball splashed the sea perilously near our pinnace and then came the dread boom of the gun.... Very soon the pinnace was so near I could see Captain Japhet looking down at a shapeless bundle that lay at his feet with terrible look, for while his eyes glared, his lips curled back from sharp, white teeth in dreadful, beastlike fashion. Then the pinnace was alongside, the bundle was hoisted aboard, up-clambered the men and Japhet after them.

"Capstan—heave!" cried Penryn and once again all was stir and bustle, though I had no eyes for aught save this most direly changed Japhet, who stood looking down at that shapeless bundle, which now stirred convulsively and waked in me new horror. And now a gun from the pursuing ship roared again and though still too far away to hit us, yet I could see her foaming towards us under cloud of sail. Captain Japhet saw this too for:

"Ply 'em with our stern chase, Master Gunner," says he.

"Ay so!" cried old Lovepeace, whipping out his ever-ready sword and beckoning with it to divers of his fellows. "Aft wi' me, lads!" he bellowed joyfully and was gone. And so began a duel with this ship, our four stern guns against her two, since she could bring no more to bear upon us, nor did any of her shots come anywhere near us, so far as I could see; yet though we were now under sail again, she gained upon us so quickly that it seemed she was the speedier vessel.

"We are foul, Japhet!" quoth Penryn, shaking his head. "Ay, fouler than I expected."

"True enough!" nodded the Captain, nowise angered by such reproach and his fierce gaze still bent on that (to me) now pitiful bundle at his feet. "We'll careen and give her a pair o' boot tops so soon as occasion serves."

Now what in the world he meant or whether I or the ship was the "she" in question I did not know, and pondering this, I now seated myself behind one of the guns lest he should see me and command me down into the cabin, for now the pursuing ship had come so near that once or twice their shot had whistled over us, while our guns boomed sullenly in frequent answer.

"Didst hurt him, Japhet?" questioned Penryn, and peeping round my cannon, I saw him nod down at that faint-stirring bundle.

"Neither hide nor hair, Zeke."

"Art still o' the same mind concerning him, Japhet?"

"Ay, damme!" snarled the Captain. "I shall sell him for slave!"

"Not to ... Rodriguez, comrade?"

"Ay, to Rodriguez in Hispaniola."

"You were more merciful to hang him and be done, lad."

"Ay, but what have I to do with mercy, Zeke man? What had he years ago?"

"Ay, but Japhet, this was years ago and you a boy,—to-day you are a man and ... with a wife, lad—"

"Wherefore remind me o' this damned folly?"

"Howbeit, Japhet, 'tis done, she is thy wife ... and I tell thee there is far better, nobler thing than vengeance on thine enemy and this is to forgive and, forgetting such emptiness, win for thyself the better thing—"

"Now sink me! What's all this?" exclaimed the Captain fiercely. "Will ye dare preach me forgiveness, you of 'em all? You, Zeke, that I've seen ere now all spattered wi' blood o' your foes and glad of it; you that is ever foremost in fight and readiest with steel or shot or hangman's noose."

"Looke, Japhet, I'm lonely man, as were we all, with none to care if we perish or no, that live only by might of our swords—well and good! But you are of us thus no longer—you are a husband with all a husband's responsibilities. Japhet, thou'rt young and I do love thee, lad, and thus do I counsel thee from my own broken heart ... 'stead of such bloody vengeance, choose the sanctity of a home, the sweet haven that only pure love and innocent children can bring a man—had I so chosen seventeen years ago, I might have known such happiness, lad, and been worthier man—"

"Why, Zeke!" quoth the Captain in altered tone and clasping his arm about old Ezekiel's drooping shoulders. "Why, Zeke, old comrade, God love thee now! But we are but what we are and I—"

"Thou, Japhet, art wed to sweet and lovely creature, that may—"

"So will I choose vengeance!" quoth he, with jeering laugh. "Say no more, Zeke! Come now and watch old Lovepeace at work." And with his odious laughter ringing in my ears and all my body in shuddering revolt against him, I too determined on vengeance and upon himself in any and every way and using such means as I might. But now hearing a cheer I turned to look at our pursuer, this great ship, and saw her lofty fore top mast sway, totter and tumble away to windward in slapping ruin; crippled thus and the wind freshening we had soon left her far astern.

Then I arose and, speeding down into the cabin, caught up Deborah's largest scissors and with no explanation to her pitiful wails as to why the cannons were firing so, away I went! Reaching the deck, I walked leisurely, the scissors hid in my sleeve, until I came where lay the captive and, slitting up the canvas that swathed him, saw, despite torn clothes and brutal handling, he was a very comely personage and richly clad. Now as I looked down on him, he smiled up at me with such look and flash of white teeth as somehow reminded me of Captain Japhet. I glanced around and seeing no man heeded us for the moment, since all eyes watched where our pursuer still thundered at us, I snipped here and there with my scissors to such effect that his prisoning bonds fell away and, sitting up with some effort, he contrived to bow, smiled again and spoke:

"Angel of mercy!" he murmured. "My soul kneels to thee. Gracious lady, receive my thanks. Pray, how come such as you on such pirate craft as this would seem? And favour me with your name."

"Sir, mine is a long story. But my name is Ursula Revell."

"Ods life, madam! Not of Revelsmead in Sussex?"

"Yes ... yes, indeed, sir. Oh, dost know my dear Sussex?"

"Ay truly, madam, I live there when not in town. But this is marvel on marvel, for my brother was to marry an Ursula Revell.... I am Aldbourne."

"The Earl?" said I, looking my amazement.

"And your devoted servant. Yonder in quest of me cometh my ship the *Lion* out of Shoreham. 'Slife, madam, I'm yet all mazed with the speed of it all.... I was suddenly beset by these villains as I walked me ashore, gagged, bound fast, tossed

into a boat and well—here I am!"

"But surely you know who 'twas carried you here so violently and why?"

"Not the least in the world, madam, except it be for ransom, of course."

"Sir, your abductor, ay, and mine also, is Captain Japhet Bly."

"Never heard o' the rogue."

"And this is his ship the *Joyful Deliverance*."

"Oho, then she is a pirate,—ay, a very notorious pirate, by all accounts. I was warned against her at Grand Canary."

"Well, my lord," said I, looking down where he yet lay, leaning him against the bulwark much at his ease, "now you are free, what will you do?"

"Why," said he, with another flashing smile, so strangely familiar, "I might jump overboard and drown, therefore I shall remain here and await the event."

"But, my lord, he talks of selling you for slave."

"Doth he so, begad? Then, dear madam, 'tis very evident he knoweth not who I am or the value of his prize."

"Oh, but he doth, sir, he doth!" chuckled a voice above us and glancing up, we saw Captain Japhet leaning over the poop rail, smiling down on us. "He knows you, sir, for very rank knave that calleth himself John Christopher, Earl of Aldbourne." Now here, instead of dignified rejoinder from the affronted earl, was silence, and glancing down at him, I saw he leaned against the bulwark no longer, but was staring up into Captain Japhet's sneering, grimly visage with an expression very odd indeed, his gray eyes were wide and his handsome face had lost some of its ruddiness; and as he sat thus strangely silent, Captain Japhet, nodding at him, spoke again:

"Well, John Christopher, in a month or less you shall be no more than mere chattel, a much poorer, very naked knave to sweat and cower 'neath driver's whip, as many a better man hath done ... not a word, sir! Meantime, you shall sit i' the bilboes to ponder your destiny.... Aft there!" he called. "Pass the word for Absalom Troy and his mates!" And when Troy appeared very presently with his two fellows, "Absalom," says he, motioning to his dumb struck captive, "take me this dog and chain him up in the lazarette ... secure him well, Bosun!"

"Ay, ay, Captain!" answered Troy, leering sideways on his prisoner; and so the poor gentleman was dragged roughly to his feet and hustled away below deck and still with never a word, but so pale and shaken that I wondered if this could be due to fear or another emotion, and if so, what? I was yet musing this when I found Captain Japhet beside me and my poor wrist in such compelling grip that I dared not strive to free it.

"Ma'm Ursula," said he softly, yet in such tone as well might have dismayed any other, "you show a strange inclination to the company of rogues and damned rascals—"

"At the least, sir," I retorted on him and despite his threatening aspect, "I do all I may to avoid yourself!"

"There was Ramirez, ma'm; he was but poor, vain rogue, well—he lieth fathoms deep to-day by reason o' your meddling! And now here's you at it again, colloquing with much finer, braver, infinite baser rascal than ever was dead Ramirez. A potent, high-bred rascal this who yet, for the black despair, the ruin and evil he wrought, shall pay nevertheless and to the very uttermost, even though I myself—ay, and you too—should die for 't! So, ma'm, be warned and meddle not again."

With this threat he left me; and I, looking down at my poor numbed wrist, now and once more determined within myself that maugre his threatening and come what might, this miserable Earl of Aldbourne should escape and by my contrivance the dreadful fate designed for him, since how better might I avenge myself on this detested Captain Japhet than by thus cheating him of his own so dear and longed-for vengeance. So presently I went down to my cabin, there to sit and scheme how this my deserved and most determined purpose could be accomplished.

CHAPTER XV

TELLETH BRIEFLY OF MANY WONDERS AND HOW I PLOTTED

And now daily (while my schemes were maturing) so little chanced bearing on the personal and more intimate side of this my narrative that I will begin this chapter with brief extract from my journal, thus:

August 20th

To-day the weather very hot and very little wind. About midday being unable to endure my close cabin I went on deck. Towards noon saw very many flying fish and one of them falling on board it was brought to me by Jacob Fry, a young and very comely man out of the West country who hath of late been making sheep's eyes at Deborah, as indeed have several others of these mariners, and she, the sly baggage, very demurely kind to them all and despite poor Ben's jealousy. But of the fish—its wings are not so in fact but rather very large fins whereby they can so lift themselves when the wind serves them and thus flutter aloft for no little distance. This day too, after dinner, I had Deborah lay out my poor wardrobe to my inspection and sadly mortified to see how my garments do all begin to show signs of distress by reason of such constant service, in especial my gowns as item: my fine flowered silk spoiled by stain of tar and divers spots of blood, as when I tended Captain Japhet's wound, and a small rent. My broidered taffety (also something fouled by this vile tar; otherwise well enough) and my rich velvet brocade which do show mighty well though very incommodious in these sultry latitudes. Memo: To see Master Absalom Troy anent this odious tar for its more careful use.

This matter of garments and no hope of replacing them put Deborah and myself to no small perplexity in regard to the future. "And, oh," says she, "you, dearie, wi' so many lovely things back in our England and no one to wear 'em—which do seem wicked shame!" As indeed it doth.

Each day this vessel becomes more my hateful prison and much too small for him and me, since we must be for ever much too nigh one another. To-day we passed each other frequently without even a glance or least courtesy of salutation.

August 21st

Having slept poorly last night by reason of the extreme heat I woke late and in such evil temper that more than once I came very near to pulling my devoted Deborah's hair and slapping her pretty face. The vain wretch hath made herself a new belaced cap (for Ben's behoof) and do become her exceeding well, and she do know it. Going on deck I found the sun so fierce I could not endure, so came down again and lay to be fanned by Deb and yearning for my cool, sweet England.

And here I would mention the swift descent of night in these latitudes and very grateful after the garish hot day. For these be nights of magic lit by great moon of vivid, unearthly beauty or with such splendour of stars as no words of mine may ever fully tell and wake in me such awe and prayerful humility as I have ever known.

August 22nd

This morning dressed very early (Deborah sleeping) and on deck to such glory of sunrise as I would fain describe yet cannot find words adequate thereto. Presently up the ladder cometh Ezekiel, being officer of the deck, and great his wonder to see me abroad thus early and, taking my arm, walks with me to and fro, speaking so tenderly eloquent of God's vasty universe, the glories of sea and sky, the wonder of life, the promise of atonement and his deep gratitude therefor that 'twas like a prayer. And next he paints me such wondrous word-picture of these tropic lands we were approaching, their wonder of birds, flowers and luscious fruits, that I yearned to be there. After this he tells me of God's

abiding love for us poor creatures and how we should love each other too, since God is in each one of us, and how, by love and service that seeketh no recompense, only thus can come happiness and future salvation; and my heart so touched that for a moment (oh, these precious moments that come like holy angels with proffer of opportunity for choice of abiding good or ill!) for such a moment then I wavered in my so determined purpose of vengeance and could have wept (as would in very truth I had). Thus was I visited as it were by angel of the Lord, yet alas! heeded not (to my future misery and that of others beside), for soon my mind was on other things. For, thinks I, looking on Ezekiel's face just now so nobly transfigured, it is marvellous how such holy gentleman could ever have killed other men, and he moreover ordained minister of God. Thus we walked and conversed in the glory of this new day that could never dawn again. And this wonderful Master Penryn (as I say) more eloquent than I had ever heard him; but when I asked news of the poor captive, he eyed me askance, said nothing and presently left me.... After some while the Captain appeared and espying me from the lower deck was so gracious to take off his hat and give me good morning, whereupon I courtseyed, giving him the same, and with no more, away down to my cabin.

August 23rd

The heat very great so I in the cool of dawn walking the deck as yesterday and very light clad. And whom should I see on lower deck but Aldbourne, brought thither by Absalom Troy for exercise and, though pale, well enough otherwise save for fetters that jangled dismally on his wrists. Seeing me, he bowed, making prodigious clank with his irons, and I to him, and would fain have had speech with him but Troy's lowering visage forbade; moreover he presently hustled his prisoner below again.... Now as I leaned against the bulwark gazing pensively across the vast plain of ocean gleaming in a placid serenity far as eye might reach, I heard a step below me and sensing who this was, stirred not therefor, heeding him no whit. At last he spoke me and in his pleasant, cultured voice.

"Ursula, how long must we seem thus strange to each other?"

I stared away (unseeing now) across the bright waters and strove to make my back show coldly repellent as possible; therefore he questioned me again, his tone pleasantly meek.

"Ursula dearest, how long must we be avoiding each other in this fool fashion?"

"So long as I am on your wicked ship!" I answered, not even looking towards him, "And for ever after!"

"Ursula, thou sweet, contrary vixen, when you lay with me in those strong arms o' thine to snatch me back to life, kissing death from me and vigour into me ... praying, weeping for me,—was this only play-acting?"

"You were sick unto death—"

"And now I'm hale and well again, nay better than ever I was, and all by reason o' thee." Here, what with his humility of voice and wistful earnestness of look (for I could see him from my eye corners without turning head) I verily began to wish he would snarl at me, or be-ma'm me in his odious, sleepy voice, and strove desperately for some speech that should anger him, but ere I might do so, he went on:

"In three weeks or less we shall, luck serving, run into secure haven, there to clean and refit our ship, and whiles this is doing, I shall take thee to certain island well beknown to me, a very paradise, and there I shall woo thee, Ursula, and with such reverent humility as shall amaze thee ... ay, and myself also."

"Never!" cried I in strange, desperate, breathless fashion. "I'll none of your island for ... I'm nothing like to your Spanish donna of La Margarita." At this I heard him gasp, saw his face grow red then pale, saw him raise clenched hand as he would have struck me! Then he turned, strode rapidly away and as rapidly back again and, looking up at me with his grimly mocking air,

"Jealous fool!" said he and walked himself out of my sight.

August 24th

This morning I hear how Ben and Jacob Fry, the Devonshire man, fell most furiously a-fighting and, not contented with their fists, betook them to their knives and are now, for drawing steel on each other, both prisoned in irons, which it seems is a rule of the ship, and a very admirable one. So now they languish in fetters and all, as I suspect, on account of Deborah, as I told her, and the minx even as I write this, singing away in our little cabin, happy as any wanton bird.

To-day I have been much on deck (and despite the fierce sun) and though I have seen him very frequently he hath kept his distance and whenso our glances have met, he to ferocity of scowling, so it seems the wretch will trouble me no more—yet awhile, at least. And the reason I was so often on deck is the strange sea fowls flying over us and abundance of fish playing under us and all about the vessel and also a bird said to be half bird and half fish and much like to a penguin, they tell me, and I no wiser, knowing not what in the world a penguin may be.... Also were many large creatures that leapt the waves, blowing gustily, that Lovepeace tells me are grampuses, by all of which he saith I may guess we are none so far from land—though nothing to see of it, look how I will.

August 25th

All this forenoon I have been in no little taking by reason lest Ben, thus prisoned and in irons, shall balk me in the first steps towards my vengeance. But towards nightfall he appeared, and one eye much swollen, to speak as usual with Deborah, and she preening herself in the mirror behind my back. But heeding her not, I beckoned Ben aside and put to him certain question, whereupon, looking about us in very guilty fashion and twisting his bonnet in great, powerful hands:

"Ay, ma'm!" he whispers. "Aught i' the world I'll do for your ladyship and Deborah but ... if we'm caught, ma'm."

"No fear of this, Ben," I answered with as much assurance as might be, "though even should we be I can see no harm in it."

"Why, p'raps not, my lady, only ... it be agin orders, do ee see—"

"And yet, for my sake, Ben."

"Aught i' the world, my lady," he repeated.

"Your poor eye shows very swollen, Ben," said I gently: "Go you and let Deborah tend it." And away he went forthwith.

Thus, during all these days of sunny weather, I had been secretly busy furthering my scheme as you shall hear.

CHAPTER XVI

TELLETH OF A VENTURE BY NIGHT

It was midnight and Deborah fast asleep when I arose, already dressed for my adventure, and stole forth into the great cabin, there to sit me down and wait patiently as might be. And every moment my sense of guilt so grew (and therewith a strange feeling of disloyalty) that once or twice I was minded to give up my secret purpose and creep back to bed again. The ship rode very easily, for the wind was still light and the sea very gently calm, so that as I waited thus, no sound was to hear save the sweet, tinkling murmur of the placid sea and the faint, rhythmic creaking of the stout timbering about me, the which by now had become so much part of my life, as it were, that it passed all unnoticed. At last, as I sat crouched there chin in hands and very troubled for what I was determined to do, I lifted head suddenly to a soft scratching at the door, so up leapt I and opening it saw Ben, his comely face troubled as my own, and a lanthorn hid beneath his jacket; speaking no word, he beckoned me and I followed. By darksome, narrow ways he led me, scarce never daring to show a light, so that I must clutch his jacket to guide myself; down thus went we from deck to deck, where men snored or rats squeaked and scurried till, being come deep down in the ship, I smelt again that noisome, fetid reek I had shuddered at once before; then I heard a clank of fetters and Ben uncovered his lanthorn, that seemed too dazzling for sight ... and while I stood thus all unseeing, a voice cried passionately:

"Damnation! What now, cannot a man sleep even here?" And then I saw Lord Aldbourne glaring up at me from pile of straw that was his bed: and this cruelty and the misery of his clanking fetters so wrought on my pity for him and burning detestation of his heartless oppressor, that all my scruples were swept clean away.

"My lord," said I, advancing where he lay fast chained, "I come to say you have one friend in this ship scheming to your deliverance; nay, two, for this man will also help you for my sake."

"I'm grateful, madam," he answered, blinking up at me very woefully, "but how shall any one help me, pent thus aboard this very accursed ship?"

"Sir," I answered, "so soon as chance offer, you shall be freed of your shackles."

"I'm grateful again, madam," he sighed, "but how shall chance offer and, though I be free, how a God's name shall this serve me, save that I may leap overboard and so end this misery?"

"My lord," I answered, "in a week or less this ship will come to harbour; once she is anchored, you must contrive to slip overboard and get ashore unseen."

"Ay, but even so, how shall this serve? For these pirate rogues seldom dare venture into honest harbour but choose rather some barren coast or desolate island. Well, madam, must I starve or be devoured by ravenous beasts?"

"Nay, sir," I answered, somewhat nettled, "this, only God knoweth. But I will certainly aid you the best I may to escape from this Captain Japhet's cruel vengeance so soon as opportunity serve." Now at this, he rose upon his knees and no more, by reason of his close shackles, and taking my hands, kissed them very fervently.

"Angel of mercy!" said he with that quick, flashing smile, so strangely familiar. "Sweet lady, whether I live or die, my gratitude is yours. The memory of your sweet, valiant self shall make me bold to endure and cheer my anguish—"

Here the silent Ben, venturing to pull at my sleeve, motioned me to be gone, so with final words of comfort and assurance, I left this poor prisoner to his misery and darkness.

Back we crept, Ben and I, silent as we had come, nor did I venture speech until we had reached again the comparative safety of the upper deck. Then:

"God bless you, Ben," said I, whispering; "nay—what ails you?" I exclaimed for, the stars being very bright, I saw poor Ben all of a tremble, his eyes glancing fearfully this way and that and his brow shining moist. "Oh, what is it?" I whispered.

"One watched us, my lady," he answered, whispering also. "One spied on us down in the lazarette."

"Who, Ben—who?" I gasped.

"Nay, I know not, ma'am, but—one did!"

"Art sure, Ben; didst see them plain? Did you hear aught?"

"Nay, I saw naught, my lady, nor heard ... I felt ... some un was a-nigh ... a-watching of us and a-hearking—"

"No, no, this was but fancy, Ben. If you saw and heard naught, how should any one be there and not make outcry or give alarm? No, no, 'twas but fancy."

"Ay, mebbe so, my lady—and yet! Well, Lord love me, I hope so." And so away he crept and I back to bed, to lie there long wakeful and in a strange distress. Yet presently I fell asleep only to wake to rolling crash of thunder more dreadful than I had ever heard in all my life (and Deborah still blissfully asleep) and after some while, these dreadful sounds abating gave place to rain, a sound so very woefully desolate that I fell a-weeping until, once again, kind sleep took me.

CHAPTER XVII

GIVETH SOME DESCRIPTION OF STORM AND TEMPEST

I waked to find the ship labouring violently and all about me a confusion of sounds and with Deborah bending over me.

"Oh, my lady," she wailed, "how can you sleep so sweet and the sea so sudden and frightsome.... And no warm water for to bath your sweet precious loveliness, ma'm, by reason as the galley fire be out, along of a terrimendious sea as nigh drowned us all as dawn came, so Ben do tell me."

"Help me to dress!" said I.

Going up on deck, I found the sea running very high yet with little wind, so that catching sight of Ezekiel and Lovepeace I called to them, and together they crossed the reeling deck, making no more of it than it had been dry land.

"Good morrow, child!" said Ezekiel, kissing my right hand.

"God bless thee, daughter," quoth Lovepeace, kissing my left.

"But pray, why is the sea so violent and no wind?" I questioned.

"'Tis the aftermath of a storm miles away," answered Ezekiel.

"That shall come down on us ere long, if I can read the signs," quoth old Lovepeace, pointing to windward, where a black cloud seemed rising from black sea.

"True enough, comrade!" nodded Ezekiel. "Yon's blowing weather, beyond doubt. I'll down to warn Japhet," and away he strode forthwith.

"And talking o' Japhet, daughter—lookee, whom the Lord had joined in holy wedlock let no man, nor yet woman, put asunder? And how d'ye say to this?"

"I say, Master Lovepeace, that there was nothing holy in my wedding, and so I pray you no more of this."

"Why, then, as to Japhet again, he showeth mighty changed o' late and why, daughter, why?"

"Nay, ask this of himself. Yet pray you, how is he changed?"

"He veereth like the wind and as uncertain. A man o' moods, that knoweth not his own mind."

"How so, Lovepeace?"

"Well now, lookee—last night about midnight he altered course—"

"At midnight?" I repeated, in sudden apprehension. "Art sure."

"Nay, I'm sure o' naught these days, Ursula, save that now, 'stead o' running fair for Hispaniola and Tortuga, we're bound the Lord only knoweth where—and Japhet mayhap." At this moment, Captain Japhet himself appearing on deck below to peer keenly towards that threatening black cloud, down to him hasted Lovepeace, where now stood also Barnabas, Ezekiel and Troy the boatswain. And then Troy's silver pipe twittered and almost immediately the rigging seemed alive with men busily taking in the sails and so speedily that soon the *Deliverance* was showing only her headsails and lower courses, and these close reefed. And now I saw the reason for this, for glancing whither all other eyes looked, I beheld the black cloud was grown gigantic and spread, black and ominous, over the sky.

I saw also how Japhet turned to glance up at me, saying somewhat to Barnabas who, at his word, came hastening up the starboard ladder.

"Ursula," said he, taking my hand and drawing it fast within his arm, "Japhet advises you to go below, for yonder cometh fury of wind."

"Nay, Barnabas," I answered, "I had rather stay and watch than be pent down in the cabin."

"Why then, you must be secured out o' the wind: yon tempest will strike us sudden and soon; come!" He brought me down the swaying ladder to the lower deck and so to the great mainmast with its myriad ropes, whereto he tied me about and about with smaller ropes that yet left me very free to move, to stand or sit as I would. And now Troy's pipe twittered again and a voice roared:

"Weather quarters!"

"The storm will strike our larboard quarter," saith Barnabas "so the mast should protect you somewhat and no sea carry you adrift ... though you were wiser to ha' gone below. And so fare thee well. Ursula; my post is beside the steersman." And with his gentle smile away he went and very splendid methought him in his graceful might.... And then he stood before me, swaying to the roll of the vessel, a close seaman's bonnet on his wigless head, his brown features grim and most ungentle.

"Well, Madame Venom, sweet Mistress Spite," says he, "soon by your wilfulness, you shall see such elemental fury as shall make you forget your own petty angers and me too awhile, for yonder come rushing mighty winds, ma'm, to be loosed on us. Winds o' Destiny to plunge us fathoms deep into rest and joyous content, let us hope, or Winds o' Fortune to sweep us on and up to more experience of each other and a fuller living.... How sayst thou, fair Madam Duplicity?"

"Abominable!" cried I. "How dare you so name me?"

"Ma'm, in face of God's tempest yonder I dare even your peevish anger. Now, ma'm, I'll to my messmate Barnaby on the poop, but since you have thrust yourself here wantonly in needless dangers, prithee know this—should a block come down on ye with a run and spoil your beauty or spar fall and crush you out of life, thy spouse, thus bereft, shall grieve for thee and so fare thee well—wife!" And now, in this moment of awesome expectation, though I hated to have him near me I dreaded to see him go....

The ship seemed to rear herself up in sudden, fearful manner and with shrieking roar the tempest burst upon us. Howling wind, flying spray—a hissing curtain through which I glimpsed a horror that was the sea, a rushing terror hugely green and white against a black and scowling heaven, that tossed this poor reeling ship dizzily aloft and plunged her furiously down. And now, though something sheltered by the great mast, I could yet feel the mighty power of the wind ... and then even above its shrieking tumult I heard a thunderous shock, saw a huge sea curling high above the vessel and, closing my eyes in dreadful expectation of death, was buried beneath it ... was wrenched at, buffeted and, drowning, opened my eyes to see the deck aslope beneath me and this furious torrent rushing by me, where I hung gasping in my bonds. After this, consciousness left awhile till vaguely I became aware the ship had somehow freed herself of water and was racing 'neath an inky sky, split ever and anon by vivid lightning flash to show me mountainous seas that rose in foaming summits to be flattened by the howling wind.... Suddenly high above me I heard a splintering crash and then the bellowing roar of old Lovepeace, followed by the shrill summons of Absalom's pipe, I saw men, drowned shapes about me, that moved yet clung for their very lives, and somewhere was a dismal shouting.... And then I saw him near by and in my extremity of terror screamed out to him.

"Japhet ... oh, Japhet." But he never so much as glanced towards me.

"Aloft!" he shouted, flourishing the axe he held. "Stand by all! Volunteers to go aloft wi' me to cut away the t'gallant—Follow me, shipmates!" And thrusting the axe into his girdle, he swung himself into the rigging and went clambering aloft, blinded by hissing spray, torn at by furious wind and all alone; and I screaming on them to follow him.

Then up went Ben and after him Jacob Fry, and after these valiant men many others, and the ship rolling so perilously I dared not watch them climb, nor indeed had I strength to lift my hand, for what with my panic fears and the battering my poor body had taken, I languished at last and swooned to merciful heedlessness of all things.

A beam of sun aroused me, a warm, comforting ray that cherished me (as it were) back to life and knowledge, and this kindly ray shooting athwart a wrack of clouds through which I glimpsed blue sky and thanked my most merciful God therefor. And now, looking down on myself I was all shamed to see how my wet garments clung, betraying me from throat to ankles as I had been bare; therefore I began to fumble with the cords that bound me, when came hands to do this for me, brown strong hands, very capable, that I recognized at once.

"Are we safe, sir?" I questioned, still watching these hands.

"Ay, ma'm, 'tis blown out sooner than I expected, so I am here to your service." At this I murmured my thanks, whereat these hands were instantly still.

"Such unwonted humility!" said he, in mocking sort.

"And I perish with cold, sir."

"Yet 'tis tropic sun might soon dry thee."

"Yet I would fain get me to my cabin, sir."

"As you will, ma'm." And the hands became busy again so that I soon stood free; but now, when I essayed to walk, what with my poor, stiffened limbs and dreadful rolling of the ship, I must have fallen but for the support of his arm; so there stood I very miserable in my unwonted weakness and hotly conscious of my garments.

"And what now, ma'm?" he questioned.

"I do but wait for recovery of my strength, sir."

"And in the meanwhile this fine bright sun shall dry you."

And when I had stood thus helpless a long minute:

"Pray, Captain Japhet, if you will be so good to call Barnabas to me—"

"And why Barnabas? I can lift and stumble with you so far as your cabin, if you supplicate with sufficient humility, ma'm."

Now at this I made a second attempt to walk and might perchance have succeeded after a fashion, but at my first awkward step his arms were about me.

"Come—ask me!" said he. And now, when I would have retorted on him angrily, I must needs begin to laugh like any hysteric fool, whereat he laughed too.

"Come, ask me," he repeated, "or some o' the lads may be spying the sweet, redundant shape o' thee! Bid me carry thee!"

And so I obeyed him perforce. And when we had gone thus a little way:

"Faith," he murmured. "There is more to thee than methought!"

"Sir, this is odious!"

"Nay, not odious; scarcely odious, child, such have their attractions."

"Captain Japhet, you shame me!"

"Then hide thy so modest, so maidenly blushes, on shoulder o' thy spouse, the which is rightful place for such."

After this I suffered the wretch in silence till he brought me into my cabin. And here (though he had borne me easily enough) he makes great to-do, puffing and blowing, mopping his brow as the weight of poor me had been all too much for him, and Deborah appearing in the midst of it from our little cabin (and her poor face very white), I must needs begin to laugh again and she, forgetting her past fears, begins to titter. And seeing us in this posture:

"Oh, my sweet lady," cries she, "hath he brought thee home at last; where now shall thy Deborah sleep this night?" At this was silence, nor did I speak until he had left us, then, notwithstanding my bruises and weakness, I boxed her naughty ears bitterly, chiding her forwardness until she fled wailing before my fury of indignation.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE WHICH IS OF BUT LITTLE MOMENT

Scarce had I reached the deck next morning than I was greeted by such rousing cheer as surprised me beyond words and pleased me not a little; and as I stood confused by this so unexpected greeting of these sailormen and very conscious of these many eyes that viewed me so kindly and wondering what it might be all about, forth of their fellows stepped Ben and Jacob Fry (who had grown marvellous friendly since striving so recently to slay each other); so came these two as far as the poop ladder and, halting there, looked up at me and then at each other; then each knuckled an eyebrow, made a leg and finally, clearing his throat, Ben addressed me:

"My lady—" he began, very hoarse and loud, whereat:

"Ay, ay, ma'm, lady it is!" quoth Jacob.... At this moment I caught sight of Captain Japhet with Barnabas watching these strange proceedings and growing the more self-conscious, yet showed myself very sweetly serene (at least so I do hope).

"What is it?" I enquired, smiling down upon these two comely mariners. "What would you, shipmates?" Now at this the men cheered louder than ever; which done:

"My lady," said Ben for the second time, "Jacob and me and our messmates all ask ee for to take this here as a mark o' our respex, ma'm, seeing as how my lady you could risk the perils—"

"Ardships, Ben, dangers o' wind and wave," prompted Jacob.

"Ay, ay, my lady," quoth Ben hoarser and louder than ever, "and venturing your own body along of ours, my lady, so bold and sailorly.... And here it be, ma'm!" He now gestured with one hand whereupon two men stepped forward, bearing a great roll of canvas which they unrolled, displaying a noble mat or rug made of rope or yarn very artificially wrought. From this I looked at the many faces upturned to mine.

"Oh, men of the *Deliverance*," said I, speaking on impulse, "I have watched you in battle and seen you in storm of tempest and I am proud of such valiant shipmates ... thank you—" And when I would have said more I could not and they tossing up their hats and cheering me so heartily that I fled lest they should see how I wept. But reaching the cabin, I instantly despatched Deborah for my mat, the which was presently brought and laid down, and mighty comfortable I found it, as indeed it still is, for it is so well enwrought it biddeth fair to outlast me and mine and all the strong, deft hands that went to its creation.

August 28th

Opening my worn and battered journal I see that I have very deeply underscored this date, as well indeed I might, for on this day we sighted land, and in the nightfall of this most fateful day befell that which was to plunge me into yet further perils, and a strange new world wherein (though very grievously) I learned to outface terror, to smile at pain, to endure all uncomplainingly and finally to forget my very self in such wonder as I had never dreamed. For true it is (at the least in my experience) that nothing truly great may be achieved or come to us but by way of pain, suffering or travail in some sort. And how thus I came to so endure, and wherefore, you shall learn that, having perused my narrative thus far, shall read on patiently to the end.

But because this day was to so alter my world and my poor self with it, I will, very properly, let it begin another chapter, —thus:

CHAPTER XIX

HOW AND BY WHAT MEANS I WAS TRANSPORTED INTO A NEW WORLD

August 28th

Deborah had bathed and well-nigh dressed me when sudden and plain above all other sounds rose a cry that thrilled me from head to foot and set my heart a-leaping with such wild, half-fearful ecstasy that it was like some premonition to warn me back or lure me on,—the faint, long-drawn cry of:

"Land-ho!"

Scarce waiting for Deb to finish with me, up rushed I on deck to glance eagerly around and stand in petulant vexation for, look how I would, nothing showed save the drear monotony of this everlasting sea. But now Barnabas hailed me where he was perched high in the rigging overhead, pointing me in a certain direction; yet even so—nothing of land could I see, and was for returning to my cabin in a pet, when down he came and with gentle patience at last contrived to point my erring eyes to something on the distant horizon, a small, vague blur that seemed no more than wisp of cloud; then seeing me so eager, he calls for his perspective glass, explaining its manage and thus, steadying it across the bulwark and pointing it this way and that, there presently burst on my delighted sight a vision of green sun-kissed hills with flash and sparkle of water, and I now more yearning to come near it than ever.

But the wind blew light all the morning and toward noon, as if to aggravate me, failed us altogether, whereupon divers of the sailors fell a-whistling for a breeze in shrill, cheery chorus, yet to none avail, for when at last the wind arose it must blow contrary, so that the ship must ply against it, this way and that, and sorely missing her maintop mast that greatly methought also marred her stately beauty.

Thus day was far gone ere I looked my first upon this wondrous fair land of palms, tree-girt hills, lush valleys and wide stretches of white sand that I yearned to set foot upon.

As I stood viewing this alluring prospect with eyes of longing, came Ezekiel to lean beside me and view it too.

"Know you this place and all the wonder of it?" I questioned eagerly.

"Somewhat, Ursula, for I have visited it but once to wood and water. 'Tis an island, as I do think, and never a human soul on it, though a man might live there all his days and lack for naught, so rich and bounteous is kind Nature in these latitudes." And now he paints me such picture of the marvels to be seen there, the glory of flowers and birds of wondrous plumage, the succulent fruits and herbs and vegetables, that my eager yearning for all this increased on me a thousandfold.

Great was my annoyance therefore when I heard Troy's pipe sound, the yards creak aback and found the ship was to anchor so near yet so far from this delectable isle, so that bethinking me of the luscious fruits, the sweet, fresh water and paradise of flowers, I stood staring away, my heart in my eyes (as it were), even as poor Tantalus himself must have done.

After some while and night about to fall, I mounted the poop to get me below, when I saw they were heaving a boat over-side. Now Lovepeace chancing near, I cried out to him for the reason.

"Nay, daughter," saith he, shaking his head like one all bemused, "the Lord knoweth, for 'tis five mile and more to yon island and the wind fails. Perchance Japhet is minded to pull so far,—though his orders are for the morning ... but why launch boat now and risk her going adrift in sudden squall passeth mine understanding. 'Tis queer lad o' late, our Japhet!" And away strides old Lovepeace, shaking his head at me as I were somehow responsible.

"Deb!" said I, the moment I stepped into our cabin, "go you and bid your Ben to me and instantly!" And away she goes, blithe as any bird: and presently back she comes and with her this faithful fellow, though methought his comely features somewhat downcast.

"Ben," said I, "to-night we free the prisoner."

"Nay, but, my lady," he began, glancing this way and that, anywhere but at me, "axing your grace, my lady, but—"

"At eleven o'clock, Ben—nay, so soon as the ship be asleep, you will show me where I may steal the keys of his fetters, then back to your hammock and leave the rest to me."

"But lady, an' he reacheth the island, how shall he there 'scape the Cap'n's vengeance ... or I, for that matter?"

"Content you, Ben," I answered, "the prisoner's future is in God's hands, and as for yourself, Captain Japhet shall not punish you for doing my behest except he punish me too ... and once we are safe back in dear England, I shall know how to reward your faithfulness. So come for me, Ben, so soon as it be safe."

Supper done, I sat me down to write into my journal and thus sped the time until Ben came stealing to signal me.

"Ma'm," he whispered, "there's none stirs alow or aloft save the anchor watch, yet creep you soft."

Now will I pass over with brief mention how he showed me a hole dim-lit called the armoury, with prodigious number of swords, muskets and the like in racks, and in one corner bunches of keys a-dangle, more especially those I sought and that by his directions I myself took: or how I went creeping down into that noisome lazarette; or of the poor prisoner's glad surprise at his sudden freedom and grateful thanks to me; or of how I brought him, Ben guiding us, out into the stern gallery, beneath which lay the boat, and how, with last whispers of thanks, Lord Aldbourne swung himself down into the boat.... But scarce had the Earl made this descent than Ben, this great, strong sailor that had ever showed so gentle and submissive to my every command, seemed to go mad, for deaf to my indignant remonstrances, he now snatched off the kerchief I wore and therewith stifled my outcries; then he binds me hand and foot and, thus mute and helpless in his powerful clutch, I was lifted, swung dizzily in air and lowered down into the boat, where Lord Aldbourne received me in his arms.

"Be still!" he whispered and then, as I struggled desperately 'gainst the indignity of my bonds, he bound me the tighter until I might scarce move finger and laying me down (and none too gently) began to paddle slowly but very silently away from the ship. And now I could have screamed yet might not, and helpless thus and wildly despairing, watched this good ship *Deliverance* loom up hugely against the dark, a vast shape growing vaguer, with dim lights atwinkle here and there that winked ever fainter upon my yearning sight until these too had vanished and naught to behold but the blank, infinite immensity of mighty sea and starless sky.

And now the Earl was rowing might and main. I could see the dim shape of him, swinging back and forth with creak and splash of the oars. And something in this gasping fury of effort, that was bearing me towards I knew not what, something in his dumbness and the relentless sway of his dim-seen body, filled me with sudden panic; and as I lay thus, shivering in very sickness of dread, what must I think of but Captain Japhet's hateful, sleepy voice ... and in this moment I yearned with all of me, ay, body and soul, to hear him "be-ma'm" me now.

Slowly the mist, or clouds, thinned away and I beheld a glory of stars that made a strange, quivering twilight, and in a little a radiance that presaged a rising moon.

"Ursula ... madam ..." gasped the Earl and now I saw he had ceased rowing and was leaning upon the heavy oars to peer at me, "so soon as I catch ... my breath ... I'll lose those so charming limbs for thee, though why or wherefore you had yourself so trussed up, I cannot think." Presently he clammers where I lay and with very fumbling, awkward fingers contrived to set me at liberty; and no sooner could I speak than:

"Sir," said I, "have the goodness to row me back to the ship."

"Row you ... back?" he exclaimed, in tone of such amazed disbelief that I could have struck him.

"Aye, back, sir—this instant," said I, glancing round about for some glimpse of the ship and seeing none.

"But my dear ... Mistress Revell, will you actually tell me you are not here by your own free will?"

"Heavens, sir," I cried angrily, "must I say such very obvious thing? Let my cruel bonds speak!"

"Nay, madam, these may have been but feminine deception, and sweetly excusable, for coyness is always admirable even for the behoof of rogue pirates—"

"My lord," said I scornfully, "you make very odious suggestion."

"Then pardon me, for I'm all bemused ... but am I to understand you have not then elected to flee yon company of rogues and throw in your lot with me?"

"No such thing, sir!" I answered, my eager gaze still questing for the ship, in the growing radiance.

"Nay, madam, we are out of earshot of your *Deliverance*; look yonder rather; in half an hour or so we should be ashore, there is some current taking us and so sparing me the labour. See, yonder is the island! And yet, once there—then what?"

"I shall wait on the beach for my *Deliverance*; she must surely come so soon as he misseth me."

"Gads my life, madam," exclaimed the Earl, staring on me like one extremely surprised, "can you verily mean you wish to be back on that accursed ship?"

"Ay, with all my heart!" I answered, for now indeed seeing this island so near ... all desolate beach and horrid dark woods, I wished it a thousand miles away.

"But, my dear child," he persisted, as one that could not bring himself to believe my words true, "what of your so pressing interest in me and constant kindnesses to me; am I to verily believe these sprang from no more than mere disinterested good nature or compassion?"

"You are to know and believe, sir, this was no more than a tender woman's sympathy for a very miserable, sorry wretch!"

"Zounds!" he exclaimed, frowning and rasping at his unshaven chin that, with its unlovely bristles and despite his finery of curled peruke and laces, lent him very sinister look. "You've a bold tongue, Madam Ursula."

"Yet a bolder heart, sir!" said I, striving not to show the least hint of my persistent fear of him.

"This is very well, madam, so long as 'tis such woman's heart and groweth not ... overbold. But now for your attitude regarding myself; this shall, I fear, prove very devilish awkward for you."

"Not the least in the world, sir," I answered, "for so soon as we land, you being the man of honour your rank proclaims you, will express your gratitude for the chance of liberty I have contrived for you and leave me to wait the coming of ... my friends."

"Friends, say you, madam! And what shall these same fine friends say of you ... think of you anent this our adventurous flight together?"

"Whatso they will!" I retorted.

"Ursula," said he, leaning nearer, "thou'rt a strange creature and this I like,—thou'rt proud, wilful creature and this may be amended; thou'rt a comely creature and this I like so well—"

"You grow frowsome, my lord!" said I to check him.

"Not I!" he smiled. "But, Ursula, though I have thus far eluded the treacherous swamps and quicksands of matrimony yet, under these circumstances and for thine own sake, hear me vow and declare there is none I would liefer see my countess than thy so valiant, handsome self."

"Sir," retorted I, and with a sufficing coldness, "I protest you do overwhelm me. But such high honour is not and cannot be for my lowly self since I am already wed—"

"And here, sir, sitteth or lieth her lowly spouse!" said a sleepy, mocking voice. And then, as we sat there dumbstruck, staring and utterly confounded, up from beyond where lay the bulk of mast and sail rose the grim, smiling face of Captain Japhet.

And despite his jeering look, there rushed on me such consciousness of strength and security that I instantly frowned into his so unexpected, mocking face.

CHAPTER XX

TELLETH HOW WE CAME ASHORE AND OF A GOLDEN SKULL

"So!" quoth he. "A runaway wife and a plausible, thrice damned villain! Well, these sort well together."

"Captain Japhet," cried I, fiercely indignant, "since you have been listening—peeping thus and prying, you know very well that I am no runaway!"

"And yet, Madam Peerless Virtue, here you sit, consorting with a knave that, conscious of his knavery, is dumb as a stock-fish."

"I save my breath!" retorted the Earl.

"Ay, you'll need it, Christopher John; this current fetcheth past the island, so get to your oars now and row."

"And if I refuse?" demanded the Earl, with sudden ferocity.

"This!" answered the captain, taking up rope's end and with such evident horrid purpose that I turned my back on them. "So up and pull, man; pull and with a will!"

"And you are armed, I see!" said his lordship bitterly.

"Ay, I am, John, a brace o' barkers and two swords,—so set to work, John, and lay your rogue's back into it—give away!" At this, perforce Lord Aldbourne began to row again, whereupon Captain Japhet came and seated himself beside me in the stern; and heeding me no whit, began to talk with a very hateful jocosity.

"Row, John man, row and rowing, hearkee! I have planned to carry thee into Hispaniola and there sell thee, for whatso that carcass o' thine shall fetch, to one Don Miguel Rodriguez that is ever in need o' slaves since the dogs have a habit o' dying on him. But this plaguey meddlesome spouse o' mine, having a natural predilection for rogues o' thy sort, hath—"

"Enough!" cried I, turning on him in fury of indignation, "enough, you shall not so—" But here I caught my breath and shrank away, appalled by such evil look as I had never seen ere now—even on his face.

"Spit not, Puss! Madam Cat, mew not!" said he with the same dreadful jocularity. "As I say, Johnny man, this same prying spouse o' mine hath set us upon another course, so must we tack about, d'ye see, ere we bring up in Hispaniola and the slave pens of the noble Don. Thy starboard oar, pull, man—and again,—so—as she is!"

By this time the moon had risen and all things very plain, so that glancing back, I presently espied a vague shape, small with distance, that I guessed for the *Deliverance*, the which seemed now a very ark of refuge compared with the near prospect of this island that, now grown large upon my sight, showed a wide, curving beach very white under the moon and backed by sombre groves of dense leafage, sweeping in dark waves, sloping up and away to a jagged rocky summit.

Guided by Captain Japhet's directions the Earl, breathless by this time and well-nigh spent, brought the boat into a small rock-girt haven and here, at the Captain's ungracious bidding and no offer to help me, I must needs clamber ashore as best I might, while the Earl at his bidding made the boat secure.

And thus it was that I set foot upon this so yearned-for island and seeing Japhet's face and the two swords beneath his arm, wished myself any otherwhere.

"Well, Johnny man," said he, unsheathing the two glittering blades and setting them upright in the sand, "here we are and here shall we pass the night; to-morrow we set forth on our travels. But sit down, John, and fetch thy breath, for presently I must set my brand on thee as I did upon brother Geoffrey back in England, my sign manual for all the world to read hereafter—except thou pink me, Johnny."

"Have done with your devilish mockery!" exclaimed the Earl fiercely. "If 'tis a duel you mean, give me sword and let's to it!"

"Ay, ay, Johnny man, and with a will!" quoth the Captain gesturing. "Here are the tools—choose thou." Uttering no word,

the Earl snatched the nearer and instantly made a stabbing thrust which Japhet narrowly avoided.

"Ha, murder, is it?" snarled he and speaking, whipped pistol from belt and levelled it.

"Well, shoot—damn you!" said the Earl between pale, passion-contorted lips.

"Why, so I would Johnny man, were it not too good a death for roguery ... too kindly quick. No, no, thou'rt destined to such living hereafter shall make thee yearn for such sweet easement as a pistol ball. But now to thy branding ... stand on guard, Johnny—now!" I saw the wicked blue flicker of the blades, heard them ring together and then, knowing this (in some sort) for my doing, I snatched off my cloak and leaping, flung it about these darting blades and so grasped and held them.

"Stop!" cried I, staring into Captain Japhet's sinister face. "If you will to murder each other, spare me the horror of it." And then, ere he might speak, the Earl loosed his sword and next moment I had sent it whirling and flashing, to fall into the sea. This done, I turned again to confront the Captain and front his anger as best I might, trembling, to be sure, but with eyes that met his lowering gaze unflinching. And now, when I had thus braced and strung myself to meet his furious tirade or even blow, he neither spoke nor raised hand against me, only he looked at me with his crooked, quirkish smile. Then he sheathed his sword and grasping me by the arm:

"Well so, Johnny," saith he, "since madam hath put an end to our gentlemanly diversion, we'll see thee safe abed,—come!" So he brought us up the beach through a grove of strange trees into a place of rocks that were riven into many caves, large and small, one of which had been furnished with a rough door of ship's timbers that hung askew, all warped by much weather; it was into this he gestured the Earl.

"There'll be lizards, mayhap, with a spider or so, but 'twill keep thee well enough till dawn, for then we march—in with thee, Dog's-meat!" quoth he. And when the Earl would have resisted, the Captain's pistol muzzle drove him into that unlovely place, whereupon he clapped to the heavy door and wedged it fast with such timbers as chanced to be there. This done, he brings me along this rocky gorge to where yet another cave opened beneath the steep into which he vanished suddenly and as I stood at a loss, not knowing whether to follow him into this dreadful place or no, I heard him groping about in the darkness and cursing very savagely. Then was clatter of iron and out he came bearing a mattock, spade, etc., on his shoulder and, beckoning me to follow, led the way up a steep, bush-grown track till we came to a plateau very lush and green with strange, stately trees and such wonder of flowers and vegetation as filled me with ecstasy. And these flowers grew over and about great wrought stones, some of them strangely carven, so that here once, I judged, must have stood some vast building or rather temple, for midway in this plateau rose a great column all clinged about by vines and glory of flowers, through which yet peeped a strange face carven in the stone that seemed to leer and yet scowl down on me where the moon caught it, the which I thought must be the face of some heathen idol and would fain have asked about it, but Captain Japhet's face showed fiercely repellent as the carven features above us; so I held my peace and seating myself, watched his doings; as well indeed I might.

For, tossing aside the tools, he had taken out a compass and now was pacing out distances from the idol, counting his steps very carefully; after the which evolutions, he marks him a certain spot, throws off his coat and waistcoat, and catching up spade and mattock falls a-digging.

And now as I watched him, the moon up and very bright above us, what with his saturnine visage and the vivid kerchief knotted about his wigless head, he seemed verily as much or more than the pirate Lord Aldbourne had so certainly denounced him.

Thus I sat watching him and thus he laboured, pausing only to sweep brawny arm across streaming brow and fetch his breath, and never a word between us. And now, my mind running upon buried treasure, pirate hoards and the like (and very naturally), I yearned to come where I might peep down into the hole he had dug and yet (remembering my dignity) I stirred not ... but suddenly he stooped and when I saw for what, I leapt afoot, crying out for very horror since, instead of casket of gems, he was clasping a ghastly human skull.

At my outcry of disgust, he glanced up, leapt from the grave and came towards me, the grisly thing between his hands and turning it this way and that:

"Well, but," saith he, "we must all come to this soon or late and yet—not as this. You shrink from this as thing abhorrent and mayhap 'tis but natural, yet upon a day thousands bowed the knee afore this poor thing: ay, and thousands died at its

mere nod. In this small compass lay the brain of mighty king and conqueror. This is said to be the skull of Mayta Capac, ma'm, the Fourth Inca, and I think 'tis verily so, for—lookee!" So saying, he began, and with a certain reverence, to rub the damp earth from this dread thing until I stared amazed to see it all agleam beneath the moon.

"Gold?" I murmured.

"Ay, ma'm, gold! Thin plates set and welded about it with such wondrous craftsmanship it seemeth verily skull of gold. And here, if you dare closer, you shall see that which maketh this long dead thing most eloquent," and he pointed me graved marks and lines upon this skull that formed rude pictures, with many strange symbols.

"But what doth it mean ... what signify these characters?"

"Ay, what," he repeated, throwing up his head to stare wide-eyed upon the brilliant moon. "Well, ma'm," he murmured, "if fortune prove kind and my luck hold, it meaneth wealth beyond computation, power to sway men's destinies; fleets of ships to sail at my will, armies of men to do my behests.... Here is vengeance, love, friendship, hatred, peace, war, murders, blessings, all the good and all the ills this world may offer a man. But for the present, since we march early, let's to bed, ma'm."

And tucking this golden skull beneath his arm, he clutched my wrist and led me thus whither he would and my poor heart so beating methought it would choke me.

CHAPTER XXI

TELLETH HOW I SLEPT IN A ROPE

Thus he leading and I following, mute and submissive like some poor lamb to the slaughter, we came back to the boat.

"First we'll eat!" quoth he, gruffly ungracious as any coarse sailorman. "You'll find the wherewithal in the locker under the stern seat yonder and then gather sticks and driftwood for a fire, while I bestow the skull in place of safety." Now at this I merely looked at him, whereat he scowled and grew coarser yet.

"Come, tumble to 't, my lass; no standing off and on; here's no place for fine lady megrims; you'll do your trick along o' me and yon lubberly Johnnyman—so jump, ma'm, bustle to 't, d'ye hear?" For a moment I defied him, but his looks became so brutal and my situation already so desperate that I obeyed him with as much dignity as might be. Then off he goes, singing to himself. Very soon he came striding back and, seeing the pile of wood I had heaped together:

"Sink me!" he exclaimed. "'Tis to be hoped ye can cook better than build a fire! How a-plague shall this kindle, think ye? Watch now and learn against next time. Lookee—lay your small twigs alow and heavier aloft—and thus like the gables of a house." After this, when he had got his fire going (and very hatefully soon) and he demanding I should cook supper, I vowed I could not and folding hands in my lap sat me down, resolved to endure the extremity of his anger rather than show myself his too willing slave thus: and so we sat opposite and frowning on each other a long moment.

"Cannot or will not?" he demanded.

"Both!" I retorted; whereupon he stared up at the moon, fell a-whistling and set about the business himself. And here I will confess he contrived all things with that quick deftness which it seems most sailormen possess; and was no bad cook, judging by the savoury odours that presently began to tantalize me, since though hungry I had no mind to eat with him, as I told him.

"How then," quoth he, "must I needs cook for and feed thee? For eat you must and shall, against to-morrow's journey." And speaking, he makes ply with a spoon and to such evident purpose, that I ate perforce, though making wry faces over it. And this the first meal we had ever eaten together.... This done:

"And what of your poor prisoner?" I demanded.

"To-morrow!" he answered. "He eats to-morrow. And now, lass," quoth he, rising, "when you've washed these pans and platters, stow 'em i' the satchel yonder and we'll to bed—"

"Do not call me 'lass!'" cried I.

"No?" quoth he, as mightily surprised.

"No!"

"Then what?"

"My name is—Ursula!"

"Ay, but then this argueth such familiarity, and we so wed, and so alone,—no, no—Ursula is too plaguily, suggestively intimate, and I being such poor, humble, modest mariner—"

"Oh, call me what you will!" said I, turning my back on him.

"Ay, ay, lass!" he cried cheerily. "Have at the dishes whiles I go prepare a couch for thee." So I, himself out of sight, began my odious task to cleanse these greasy dishes, etc., using only my finger tips; and having placed them within the great leathern bag that seemed to hold store of provisions, I sat gazing upon the unreal beauty of the scene about me, the white strand, the great palm trees, the placid sea all glorified by the moon's radiant splendour and yet, though strangely stirred, thinking upon none of these but only of myself and this strange Japhet that was my husband and now making my bed ... and in my poor, trembling heart was mighty yearning for my dear, sane England ... for Deborah ... then I heard his step behind me and, obedient to his word, rose up and meekly followed.

He brought me to a cave and in this, where the moon's vivid beams might not reach me, a heap of herbs and grasses, very fragrant, that was to be my couch.

"There's for you, lass," said he, "and right proper bed you'll find it, yet first—this!" and he showed me a length of rope.

"Well, what now?" I demanded.

"A device shall save ye walking in your sleep or, what's more, walking in mine—"

"What folly!" said I, half laughing.

"Well, you might take a mind to release my prisoner Dog's-breakfast yonder—"

"If you mean Lord Aldbourne—"

"Ay, I do, lass, I do. I've no mind to have my weasand slit, d'ye see?"

"How dare ye think such thing!" cried I in fury.

"Well you loosed him once afore, lass, once afore. So here's to make sure you don't do it again."

"I'll not submit to be tied so!"

"Ay, but you will! A turn about you with this, amidships, my lass." Then he had snatched me to him, had passed the rope about me and secured it round my waist with cunning sailor's knot.

"Now, t'other end about me—so!" quoth he, suiting act to word. "Here then shall we lie, ma'm, fast joined together i' the bonds o' matrimony, which is one thing, and a good stout rope, which is another and for the nonce a much better thing. Now lie you down, close your pretty eyes and dream o' poor Japhet like good submissive lass."

So saying, he went from the cave and vanished. So down I lay, the prisoning rope about me; and when after some while I ventured to give this a little tug (as by accident) I felt him tug it in answer. And now, strangely enough, either by reason of the open air or the sweetly aromatic couch whereon I lay, sleep took me ere I knew it. But waking in the night's pitchy darkness, for the moon was gone, glad was I of this rope about me and, feeling it stir when as he turned in his slumber, the darkness had no terrors for me, and I presently fell into peaceful sleep again.



CHAPTER XXII

TELLETH HOW WE SET OUT IN THE DAWN

The same rope it was that roused and awoke me by its persistent twitchings, so that opening sleepy eyes I beheld him standing in the cave's mouth, his shapely figure dark against a flaming dawn.

"Up, slugabed!" saith he, giving another twitch to the rope. "Rouse out, messmate, and stand by for breakfast!" So up rose I and feeling myself all unlovely with sleep: to wit;—my poor garments sadly rumpled, my hair disordered and my eyes heavy, forth came I into the bright, glad dayspring and sinking before him in my most gracious and stateliest curtesy:

"Good morrow, Sir Grimly Tyrant!" quoth I. Now at this he opened his grey eyes at me and stood for a moment quite dumbstruck; then off came his seaman's bonnet and he made me his reverence with extremest punctilio:

"Madam Imperia, your very devoted, humble servant to command!" says he. So there we stood, bowing and courtseying to each other very fool like,—as we had been in St. James' instead of this lonely wilderness.

"Then my command is that you show me where I may find water, some pool or freshet where I may lave sleep from me, and whiles this is a-doing, you shall kindle a fire that I may presently prepare your Noble Jailorship's breakfast—nay, first pray free me from these toils o' servitude." So forthwith he loosed off the rope about me.

"And now for your ladyship's ablutions," saith he, "behind yon grove you shall find all to your mind and I would advise you bathe and make the most of it, since God knoweth when you shall know such luxury again." Now as I went, following his directions, I became aware of wonders at every turn, with such screaming, chattering, screeching and piping all about me as well-nigh deafened me, above and around me birds fluttered and flew and these of such diverse and wondrous plumage and vivid hues they seemed like so many flying jewels, while everywhere strange flowers bloomed in riotous beauty, with strange fruits so luscious-seeming I was minded to pluck and taste of them, yet mindful of wise old Ezekiel's warning, did not.

So came I suddenly into a little flowery glen and here in rocky basin all festooned in flowers a crystal pool that brimmed and trickled with soft, pretty tinkle. And here besides, neatly disposed upon white cloth, my own comb and brushes and toilette necessaries every one, so that I stood amazed (and no wonder). So I bathed me and what with the sun, the fragrant air and this wonder of fruits and flowers about me, never enjoyed anything more. Then having taken sufficiency of time that he might have the fire lighted and perchance cook the meal himself, I dressed me at leisure and with my toilette articles in the cloth beneath my arm, went back, sweetly refreshed, all aglow with vigorous life and the comfortable knowledge that despite my poor, ill-used gown, all was with me as it should be, and very enjoyably hungry.

I found him busied at the fire that crackled merrily and (to my great satisfaction) the breakfast ready, judging by its fragrant and delicious aroma.

"Aha, doth it invite?" saith he. "In no coffeehouse in London or any other where, shall you drink coffee the like o' this, taken from a Spanish galleass out o' Java. Ha'n't you noticed its excellence aboard the *Deliverance*?"

"Indeed and I have!" said I. And after some while, the pangs of hunger something assuaged, "Sir," said I (and very graciously), "I would thank you for ... for these," and I gestured to the cloth that held my toilette things. "May I ask how they came hither?"

"Well," he answered, pouring me more of this wonderful coffee, "while you were busily stealing my prisoner out o' my ship, I was as busily stealing your fripperies out o' your cabin ... to Mrs. Deborah's direction, to be sure."

"Then you ... you knew ..." says I faintly.

"Ay, I knew!" he nodded. "Whatso Ben did was by my orders, for sure."

"Then you crept ... you peeped and pried on me!" said I indignantly.

"Ay, I did, lass, I did!" he nodded, reverting to his coarse manner and speech. "I watched a fool lass meddle in what nowise concerned her and might have brought down on her own fool head such harms and miseries, ay, such shame,

ma'm, as I blush to speak on, being such plaguey modest sailorman."

"You mean ... the Earl of Aldbourne?"

"Yea, lass, and no, lass, for I mean my Johnny, yon hunk o' dog's meat! Wouldst care to be stranded here alone ... with our Johnny—think, fool lass, think ... all last night! What should you be doing now? Not eating with such hearty appetite, I'll warrant me!" Now here, despite the hateful mockery of his tone, I stole a look at him and saw his face so grimly stern I shivered at the vile horrors his words conjured to my too vivid imagination; and then lest he should deem me so affected:

"And pray, what of my lord?" said I. "Is it part of your cruel vengeance to starve the poor gentleman?"

"Not so, lass—no, no. A man must be hale and strong to suffer apt and properly, as I do know. So I've tended Johnny's needs; he sitteth even now guzzling sweet water and gnawing on a ship's biscuit."

"And pray, what is your lordly will toward us poor miserable wretches?"

"Well, ma'm," saith he, leaning broad back against convenient tree, "seeing we've a good hour ere we march, I'll answer you fully as may be."

"'Japhet,' says my good comrade Barnaby (thus or in like words), 'you being now the only married man o' the Fellowship' (that is, himself, myself, Zeke, Lovepeace, Crabtree and one Rob Stukeley you know not, himself being ashore on venture of his own), 'why not settle down and beget a family as a man should?' 'With whom?' says I, amazed at such idea. 'With your wife,' says he. 'That, Barnaby,' says I, 'would be notable thought were she any other's wife or I any other's husband.' 'But,' says Barnaby, 'but Ursula?' 'Lad,' says I, 'Ursula is far beyond any butts....' Then cometh Zeke, preaching up home and children as against empty vengeance, and old Lovepeace on the same tack, d' ye see, lass,—and all so plaguily insistent, that the end of it is, for peace and quietness' sake—ay, and to kill two birds with one stone, here we are."

"Oh!" I murmured, drawing meaningless patterns in the sand with my fingers. "And what are your two birds, pray?"

"Well, it is just as I am being lectured thus on my marital duties, that you begin your creeping and colloquing with Shark's-bait yonder."

"Meaning my lord the Earl of Aldbourne!" quoth I.

"Meaning our Johnny! And seeing you so plaguey set on stealing my Johnny away from me, puts in my mind a plan or method whereby he may suffer more and you be cured once and for all of your curst prideful wilfulness."

"Oh!" said I again. "Pray how?"

"This shall be seen anon. Howbeit, I call my comrades together and speak them on this wise: 'Brethren,' says I, 'you'll have been wondering why I altered course for yon island which yet is no island. Have ye forgot how years ago I told ye how I had there hid the golden skull of the Inca?—'Ye have,' says I, 'thinking perchance I spake but idle tale, though ye should know me better.' 'Faith,' says they in chorus, 'we do.'—'Very good,' says I. 'Then mark ye. Our ship is foul with long voyaging and needeth cleansing out and in. Go ye then to Bartlemy's Bay, that ye all do know, and there careen and refit. This shall take ye a month or more. Meanwhile, I and my spouse shall land yonder, recover the Inca's skull and therewith seek one Yupanaqui, that is a mighty cacique and once my friend, anent a certain treasure long sought by many and divers adventurers, of the which this skull is in some sense the key.' So thus it was agreed atwixt us, lass, and so here we be, and should you look for the *Joyful Deliverance*, you shall not see her, for she's hull down long since, standing away south by east—"

Here I sprang to my feet and coming where I might behold the wide stretch of ocean, caught my breath, for the ship was gone, even as he had said.

"So then," cried I in angry dismay, "you have wilfully set me ashore, helpless and at your hateful will; you have—"

"Marooned ye, ma'm, marooned's the word—"

"And how long must this endure?"

"Why, this depends, ma'm,—if your legs be stout as your spirit, we should be aboard again in a month or say six weeks, though to be sure we may be stung by serpents, devoured by wild beasts, drowned, bogged, or slain by hostile Indians, but with luck, ma'm, and stout legs, it should be five or six weeks."

"Well, my limbs are not stout!" said I (twixt hysteric laughter and furious tears).

"A pity, lass, a pity. Yet constant labour shall harden 'em—"

"But I don't want them hardened."

"Not?" says he, like one vastly surprised. "Howbeit, lass, what with climbing mountains, swimming rivers and what not, ye shall presently get you such legs they shall bear you well as mine own: ay, and once aboard the *Deliverance*, you shall run up the weather rigging in gale o' wind, speedy and sure as any tarry pigtail—"

But here what must I do but burst out laughing and then a-weeping, and the end of it was the wretch cleansed and stowed away the breakfast platters himself and thus, at least, I was spared this odious business.

This done, away goeth he and presently comes back again, leading the poor Earl with a rope round his neck and the poor man very deject and woeful, and small wonder.

And now he forces my lord to gird the great leathern satchel upon his back, then buckling on his sword and two pistols and a long musket across his shoulder:

"Forward!" says he.

And incontinent forth we set on this journey wherein I was to learn so much, more especially touching myself (my weakness and strength), and learn with shame and wonder how near the primal animals we are. As shall appear.

CHAPTER XXIII

WHICH IS, FOR THE MOST PART, A CHAPTER OF WEARINESS

We had gone perhaps three miles and the sun very oppressive, when I lost the heel of my right shoe.

"Stop!" cried I.

"Avast, Johnny!" quoth he. "Belay, John! What's for thee, lass?"

"My shoe heel."

"Come adrift, hey? Then knock off t'other and be shipshape."

"Impossible!" said I.

"No such thing!" he answered. "Sit ye down." So down I sank, willingly enough, as did the Earl, groaning querulously.

"Give me thy shoe, m' lass!"

"Take it!" quoth I, reaching forth my already weary foot, the which he did and none too gently, and off came its dainty heel.

"But I cannot go without heels."

"Ay, but you can," he nodded. "You'll be amazed what ye can do afore the week's out. So up wi' you, lass! Heave ahead, Carrion!" This to the Earl, who looked more distressed than I by reason of his heavy load.

"Nay, give me a rest, man," panted he distressfully. "I'm used to coach, or saddle, and this damned bundle—damn you, let me rest!"

"Nary respite till noon—up with ye, I say!" With which he kicked the poor gentleman to his feet so cruelly I would have cried shame on him, but ere I might do so, the Earl burst forth into such cursing and vile abuse that I covered my ears—shocked and amazed so fine a gentleman might stoop to such.

"Sing out your ribaldries afore a lass, will ye!" cried the Captain and fetched him such a buffet as nearly felled him; after which shameful exhibition on both their parts, we trudged on again. And presently saith the Captain, going beside me:

"Looke, ma'm, see how thin is your fine gentleman's gentility now, that he can so readily lay tongue to such villainies as might your poor, ignorant, ragged rascal—"

"And you!" cried I. "How better are you to so cruelly entreat him?"

"Oceans better, lass! Worlds better; with all my sins, I could never be so black base as vicious Johnny."

"And who are you to thus pronounce judgment?"

"Japhet, ma'm, poor Japhet as wedded his spouse for spouse's sake, and now laments for his own."

"Laments, forsooth!" quoth I scornfully.

"With all my woeful heart!" says he sighfully. And seeing the leering mockery in his eyes, I said no more.

"How are your shoes?" quoth he at last; to the which be sure I made no answer: and indeed, for such rough going I found my heelless shoes more comfortable than I expected.

"I'm glad!" said he. "Vastly glad, lass!"

"Of what?" I questioned, speaking ere I knew.

"Your walking is so much easier. Such heels are well enough in a withdrawing-room or in the Mall, but—ha, stays now, you wear 'em?"

"What of it?" I demanded.

"Throw 'em away—burn 'em—"

"I'll do no such thing!"

"Ay, but you will: when the sun groweth hotter yet and the going harder, you'll curse 'em and yearn to be rid of 'em. And so you shall, I'll see to 't—"

"Detestable man!" quoth I, whereat he did but chuckle. And thus went we through a world methought very beautiful at the first, but as the sun beat down more fervently and the flowery festoons reached their loveliness (as it were) to catch and trip my aching feet, while shrubs aromatic clutched my petticoat, ripping it with vicious thorns, this made me begin to think all this garish beauty very sinister indeed; even the birds, that shrilled and screeched, flaunting their gaudy plumage so boldly before my startled eyes, were but a growing weariness like the little apes that leapt and swung and chattered at me so impishly from the dense foliage. As to the sky all adazzle with the merciless sun, I longed for the cloudy skies and soft, sweet rain of my so-loved England. At last, this glaring sun being directly above our heads and we entering the blissful shade of trees:

"Belay!" says the Captain, halting, "Here will we bring to awhile and eat. Also yonder, lass, is a rill; go drink and bathe your feet." But I had seen this most welcome brook, as had also the Earl for, not staying to loose off his heavy burden, he stumbled on before and casting himself face down, began to drink in fierce gulps, groaning and gasping in a rapture.

And now to see him thus foredone and all distressed, lapping up this water like any driven beast, his state and dignity all forgot, though pity for him swelled my heart, I could not but be repelled also.

And when I too had quenched my thirst and bathed my swollen, burning feet (and oh, the blissful easement of it!) we ate our midday meal together. The Captain bade us sit and tossing an evil-looking ship's biscuit to my lord (much as he had been a very dog), set before me viands so much better that ere he might prevent, I turned and thrust them into the Earl's ready hands, who with no look or word of thanks (like one sullenly ashamed) ate of them ravenously.

"Sink me, there's sad waste, lass!" grumbled the Captain, shaking reproachful head at me, "for yon's the last of our dainties ... and to waste 'em thus on rogue Johnny! Must be content with this now," and he hands me another of those biscuits and therewith a shrivelled something that I blenched from.

"Heaven's mercy!" I exclaimed, shuddering. "What would you have me eat?"

"Beef, lass," he answered, proffering it for my inspection, "flesh of an ox, ma'm, bouccaned that it may keep—what, no? Well and good, shalt devour it with sweet avidity anon." And so, because I would not eat this nor touch his vile biscuit I ate naught.

Within this pleasant shade our Tyrant suffered us to rest awhile and I so weary that I fell asleep; only to be roused by his touch, to hear him bidding us on again.

So, obedient to his command, we continued our journey and the air so close and heavy that ever and anon I must pause to breathe and he (for a wonder) very patient.

And as we tramped thus, often I heard Lord Aldbourne groan and saw him stagger 'neath his burden, at which times our Tyrant would urge him on by thrust of brutal foot or hand, mocking him the while in hateful fashion:

"What then, d'ye sweat, Johnny, d'ye sweat? Well and good, 'tis better than your pill or bolus. That fine coat now, that noble periwig, must you wear 'em, Johnny fool?" The Earl stopped and removing fine, belaced hat, snatched off his great peruke and hurled it away with frantic gesture; then, looking up and around him despairingly, trudged on again.

Nor were we permitted to rest until I, falling at last, made no effort to rise but lay there, sobbing for very weariness; whereupon he stooped and laying me across his shoulder as I had been bale of merchandise, tramped on with me and I half aswoon until, in a place of rocks, he set me down and to my joy beside a small, stilly pool; and stooping to this placid water, I saw my eyes all swollen and blubbered with tears, my hair all tumbled about me, yet too weary for caring, drank my fill and stretching out where I lay, fell asleep till I waked to the flickering light of a fire and him beyond it, busied with cooking supper.

"I thought," said I, sleepily and still outstretched, "that all our dainty food was gone; you told me so."

"And so it is," he answered. "I'm preparing this bouccaned meat."

"It smells very good!"

"And will taste better."

"And what of the poor Earl?"

"Fettered and tied to tree, as dog should be."

"Whence came his fetters?"

"Out of the satchel, sure."

After this, I lay awhile watching his face so near me and very intent on his cookery.

"Japhet," said I suddenly, whereat he as suddenly turned and looked at me.

"Well, Ursula?"

"Why are you such hatefully cruel man? So relentlessly vindictive?"

"Some day you shall hear—mayhap."

"And why not now?"

"You are still too much the useless, prideful fine lady."

"I am what God made me, sir."

"And your own idle vanities, madam, God or Nature giveth us possibilities, circumstance and ourselves mould and shape 'em."

"Why did you so trick and marry me, Japhet?"

"Ursula," he answered, looking from me to the spoon in his hand and shaking his head at it, "upon my life I hardly know ... 'twas for divers reasons ... yet which o' these I'm not yet sure on."

"What reasons?"

"Is this honest will to learn or mere idle curiosity?"

"How think you?" And here I made my eyes speak eloquently as they might.

"I think," he answered, "nay, I'm sure this pottage is ready, so let us eat." The which we did forthwith and I found this *ragout* well seasoned and flavoured with such herbs and vegetables quite new to me, as I told him and he incontinent telling me of ocas, ananas and other fruits and vegetables and how the wilderness about us was of nature so kind no traveller might starve, and the like, though I was scheming how to make him tell me more concerning himself. But ere I might think on a way, from the imminent shadows of the dense thickets rose sudden snarling roar so wild and terrible that I started to my knees in speechless panic, and yet was instantly comforted to see him nowise alarmed.

"In mercy's name, what was yonder?" I gasped.

"The Voice of the Wilderness," he answered.

"Wild beasts, Japhet?"

"Ay, but only four-legged ones, that shall not shoot us from ambush nor dare our fire: it's the beast o' two legs is the greater menace, so be tranquil. And now to sleep; get what rest you may, for to-morrow our going shall be harder."

"Can it be so indeed?" sighed I dismally.

"Ay, for to-morrow we should reach the mountain country." At this, I moaned and (he not heeding) quoth I:

"Then I must climb your cruel mountain barefoot, for my shoes are ruined beyond repair—as you may see."

"Ay!" he nodded. "This I expected and have provided against," and reaching deep into the great satchel, he drew thence a pair of buckled shoes that I knew for Deborah's.

"These," said he, "being shoes to walk in rather than gauds to vanity, should serve you very well until I can get you better."

"How better—in the wilderness?" says I, sad but ironical.

"Indian shoes, Madam Ursula, that you shall find a joy to walk in."

"Why, you may force me to walk in what you will," I murmured resignedly, "but 'twill be rather agony than joy and my feet so sadly bruised and blistered."

At this, he takes my feet, handling the poor things very tenderly and, reaching into the satchel again, presently begins anointing and rubbing them with some emollient very soothing. This done, he arose and made up the fire, placed his arms, namely the musket, etc., to his hand, then lying down:

"Now good night and go to sleep!" said he.

But as I lay staring on the fire that was at once our comfort and defence, the dark thickets about us seemed all arustle with stealthy menace, while from the awful mysteries beyond came strange cryings, chatterings, dismal wailings, with many other dread sounds near and far, so that indeed though nigh sick with weariness, I could but lie and listen, starting to every sound, until at last:

"Japhet!" said I.

"Yes?" he answered sleepily.

"Last night, when no wild-beastly horrors threatened, you must secure me with a rope: why not now?"

"To-night, Ursula, that same rope secures our Johnny."

"Well, I cannot sleep."

"Art so affrighted?"

"Terrified!" I moaned.

"Well, then, 'stead of rope, take this ... an' you will," and from where he lay, he reached and clasped my bare foot.

"How's that, messmate? Shall it serve?"

"Ay, ay, Cap'n," I murmured; for indeed, though this hand was hard and roughened by much service, it was large and comforting. And thus (and before I knew it) I sank into sleep.

CHAPTER XXIV

TELLETH IN WHAT STRANGE FASHION WE HAD NEWS OF WAR

Next morning I found myself so grievously stiff and sore that when, having swallowed such food as I could, he bade me rise, I merely looked up at him, shaking my head dumbly like the pitiful creature I was; but in his grim face was no whit of pity for me: instead he scowled brutally.

"Come up with ye," quoth he: "up I say and get into your shoes."

"No, Japhet," I answered, humbly meek yet very resolute, "I can scarce move, and to walk is beyond me."

"Yet walk you must and shall!" quoth he fiercely, whereat, yet looking up at him, I blinked until my eyes filled and gazing on him through these tears:

"Leave me," I sobbed, "oh, let me die!"

"Fool!" he snarled and stooping, plucked me up and set me upon my poor, ill-used feet.

"Into your shoes!" says he fiercely.

"Pity!" I moaned and, sinking down, stretched myself at his feet again, the which seemed to perplex the wretch (as indeed I'd hoped it might); so now, covering my face, I sobbed aloud and very miserably.

"Sdeath!" he exclaimed. "Were we alone you should be thrashed—"

"Nay, Sir Villainy," cried the Earl scornfully, "let not my presence check your natural ferocity; wreak your brutish pleasure on your weeping victim, I'll twiddle my thumbs or—"

"Peace! Worm's-meat!" quoth the Captain. "As for you," saith he, stirring my grief-stricken form with his toe, "to lie there like a broken, spiritless jade! Where now's your pride o' birth, your imperious airs? And a God's name, what good are you, what use to yourself or any other? You are but artifice shaped like woman to grace an artificial world."

"Devil!" cried I, roused by his searing words and (above all) to be thus spurned by his contemptuous foot, and, forgetting all my aches and pains, up I leapt and sprang at him to rend and tear with nails and teeth like any fury of the streets; and thus we strove shamelessly together, I to come at him and he to keep me at arm's length until my strength failed; then, lifting me all breathless in his arms:

"That's the spirit!" quoth he. "Ay, 'tis the spirit to dare fate and conquer fortune and front the unknown, nothing fearing! God love thee, comrade!" And (to my wonder) I felt his lips upon my hair, my brow, my tearful eyes; then he was sitting and myself on his knees like any child, and reaching the shoes, that had been Deborah's, he fitted them upon my feet very gently kind and almost ere I knew it.

And so we set out on this the second day of our pilgrimage and thanks to Deborah's shoes my swollen feet bore me better than I had dared hope or deemed possible, so that, my bodily distress thus eased, I began to look about me, admiring at the natural wonders of this strange, new world, more especially the infinite variety of flowers and trees; at one of which I must needs cry out in very rapture to see this great beautiful thing all aflame with scarlet blossoms, whereupon my grim gaoler, silent hitherto, condescends to tell me of it and how the Spaniards do name it *arbol de fuego*, or tree of fire. And now, seeing me thus interested, he began to point me other trees, as the candlewood, the pimento, the cocus and palms that are of nature so generous they do give food and drink and clothes beside; then the limes good against scurvy, calentures and the like ills, and the ananas that grow fruit in strange fashion like a fan. And turning aside into the denser boskage, presently brings me some and barking one gives it me to eat and so mighty delectable I found it I would have stayed to pluck me more but he forbade, telling me we should find them in great plenty whereso we would.

And now our way began to trend upwards and I saw the track we had followed was become a path and when I questioned him of this he answered with the one word:

"Indians!" This instantly thrilled me with no little apprehension, more especially as I saw him, from the tail of my eye, open the pan of his musket to examine its priming; whereupon I demanded to know if these Indians would fight us.

"Well, no," he answered, yet hitching his sword hilt ready to his hand, "no, ma'm, except they mistake us for their natural enemies."

"And who are these?"

"Spaniards, all or any."

"And how shall they be sure we are no Spaniards?"

"This I shall tell them when we reach more convenient place." Hereupon I glanced fearfully around, half expecting to see stealthy shapes threatening us from the dense thickets right and left, but I too indignant to demand his meaning.

On and up we went, the poor Earl, silent as ever, trudging on with his burden, stumbling frequently yet, as I say, with never a word of complaint; and now I noticed he had discarded his rich coat and waistcoat and went in his shirt, and this wet and clinging with the sweat of his travail; and seeing him so dumbly patient in his sufferings, I went beside him.

"My lord," said I, loud enough for our cruel task-master to overhear, "with each weary mile I do but the more admire at you."

"Madam," quoth he, betwixt gasp and groan, "you honour me."

"Ay, I do," said I, "I do with all my heart, because you do honour to your own manhood. It taketh a brave heart to endure and no complaint when Heartless Brutality drives."

"My dear lady," gasps the Earl, "but for my burden I would make you my reverence. But hush now, lest thou anger Brutality and he do violence to that sweet, tender body o' thine—"

"Yap not, cur," said the Captain and thrust at the Earl with his heavy foot so violently that he staggered and fell, gasping; then struggling to sitting posture, he looked up at his scowling oppressor and smiled.

"Sir," said he, "I am humbly grateful for this respite."

"Why then, Johnny, lie there and take your ease," nodded the Captain, "ay and you too, ma'm; sing an anthem o' your woes together whiles I speak who we are to hidden eyes and ask a question."

So down sat I beside the Earl, gladly enough, and both of us watching our gaoler, wondering at his words; and he, laying by his musket, gathers dry twigs and with tinder box makes him a fire: and when this is well aglow, covers the flame with green leaves that give forth very thick smoke that rises in that still air like tall column.

Next from the great satchel he takes my cloak and holding this spread above the fire, breaks the smoke column; and now, by manage of the cloak, he sends puffs of smoke up into the air at varying intervals, so that (forgetting all but my wonderment) cried I:

"Japhet, is it so you talk with the Indians?"

"Ay, I do," he nodded sullenly.

"But this is wonderful."

"'Tis trick I learned of the Indians."

"Then they are wonderful."

"They are," he nodded.

"And will they answer with smoke?"

"Ay."

"Whereabouts must we look?"

"Yonder!" And glancing whither he pointed, I saw that which all the morning I had taken for a cloud but which, seen now

from where we stood, I knew for a great mountain, vague and dreamlike with distance, soaring up beyond the dark forests, sweeping up in grandeur until its faint-gleaming, snow-capped summit seemed to pierce the very sky.

"Oh, Japhet!" quoth I and so was dumb, for this was the first great mountain I had ever seen. And now my awed pleasure in this stupendous wonder seemed to banish some of his black humour for, having stamped out his fire, he came beside me.

"Yonder is Mount Hualpa," said he, soft-voiced; "at least, 'tis so the Indians name it, and in its mighty shadow stands all that Spanish guns and iniquity have left of a once famous city."

"Prithee tell me of it, Japhet."

"The Indians call this city Viracocha after the name of one o' their Incas, and it is ruled by one Capac Yupanaqui."

"Capac Yupanaqui," I repeated. "'Tis sweet name and sings."

"Ay," he nodded, "the Inca dialects are strangely melodious."

"Can you speak them?"

"One or two."

"By your grace, Master Slave Driver," said the Earl, outstretched beside his pack, "shall we not eat?"

"Ay, Johnny, 'tis well bethought on."

And now, while we made our midday meal, I questioned him and he answered, thus:

MYSELF: Know you this Capac Yupanaqui?

HE: Truly. He is my brother.

MYSELF: Now, how may this be, and he an Indian?

HE: 'Twas brotherhood sworn on the blood.

MYSELF: Oh! And wherefore?

HE: We suffered i' bondage together. He saved my life and but for him I should ha' died many times.

THE EARL: Permit me to remark that had you died but once I should be content.

HE: Gad so, Johnny man, I know it. Better for you, Johnny, had you and Geoffrey ended me whiles I was but lad, for being man to-day, I'm something harder to kill, it seems. For in such personal matters as murder, Johnny, it is best to trust none but ourselves.

MYSELF: What is this talk of murder?

HE: Nay, ask our Johnny.

MYSELF: What say you to this, my lord?

THE EARL: A rogue-pirate's babble, madam! Wind, lady, wind!

HE: That shall waft thee to perdition, Johnny lad.

The Earl merely shrugged his shoulders and went on eating.

JAPHET: Nor think to win quick death o' me by shot or sudden steel; thy death shall come less kindly, John.

MYSELF: And how far hence lieth this city you tell of.

HE: Thirty leagues, or thereabout.

"Merciful Heaven," cried I, aghast, "so many weary miles, and through such hard travelling as this?"

"Worse!" he nodded. "We ha'n't reached the forest country yet. There be swamps, and tangled thickets to force, except I find the Indian track, with streams to ford and a great river to cross." Hearing this, I gazed away at that far distant

mountain in dismay.

"God help us!" cried I despairing.

"Amen!" quoth he, so smugly pious that I could have struck him; instead of which I wept, telling him that this cruel wilderness would be the death of me.

"Not it!" he scoffed. "Not it! Rather shall it bring you fuller life." At this I railed on him the more.

"Ah, cruel, heartless wretch!" I gasped, "you drive me beyond my strength—"

"Yet there you sit, ma'm, at your ease—"

"I am not able to endure such weary travail."

"And yet you will!" he nodded; "Each day shall better fit you, each mile strengthen you."

"Never! Never!" cried I, wailing, "'Twill be my death!... I shall perish, for 'tis a wicked country ... the wilderness is cruel!"

"Ay, so it is!" he nodded, "yet 'tis a cruelty that but rouseth the brave spirit to greater valiance—"

"Well, I'm not valiant," I sobbed, "nor wish to be. So here in these cruel solitudes, soon or late, I shall die, and by your wicked will, and may God forgive you for—I won't!"

"God?" he repeated; "now, ma'm, you that call so apt upon your God, open your ears and hear of mine: It is in the might of ocean, the vast silences, the desolation of such wilderness as this that God reveals Himself to such as have eyes to see, and such as do see grow bold for death or life, able to stare Fear within the eye and quail not, to see Death scowling in the way and yet march on, fearing yet unafraid ... and if we die, our woes are bravely ended, but—if we live—"

"Well?" said I and, lifting my head to glance at him, saw his brown, lean face transfigured quite, until reading the wonder in my eyes, he laughed:

"Well, what then?" I demanded.

"Why then, lass, you would prove yourself such woman that even poor Japhet would be proud to call—"

"Yes," I murmured, "to call—?"

"My good comrade!" And with the word he rose, and then stood so strangely still that I cried on him to know the reason; for answer he raised his hand to point, and looking whither he directed, I too arose and stood at gaze, for plain to be seen though very far away, black specks were rising upon the air that I knew for puffs of smoke floating up against the blue—now one, now three or four in quick succession, now one again, with varying intervals.... But when from these signals I looked again at Japhet, I saw his face so troubled that I grew troubled also and begged him tell me what dire news he read there.

"War!" said he. "Spanish troops are marching from the South; so, ma'm, beside this wilderness its cruelty, you are very like to see what Spanish soldiery can do in that way—which God forfend! Come, let us march!"

And march we did forthwith and at such pace that the Earl gasped bitter curses and I sued for respite, whereat, though he cursed the Earl in turn and scowled on me, he moderated his pace yet would not suffer us to halt until towards nightfall, spent and weary, we reached a place of coolness shut in by vine-clad rocks and flowery thickets where water plashed; and here we made camp.

So came night and the purple heaven ablaze with stars so beyond description glorious, I gazed mute for wonder of them:

"Go you and bathe," saith he ungraciously. "Dog's-meat shall aid me with the supper; and woman," says he, as I turned me wearily to obey, "as Johnny hath shed his finery o' coat and wig, come back without your stays; for an I find 'em on ye when ye return, sink me, but I'll cut 'em from you myself. So see you to 't, ma'm, and spare a poor seaman's modesty."

Deigning him no word, I followed the stream and finding a small pool all abrim with floating stars, I bathed my aching

weariness and found in this such comfort no words may tell. And going back to the camp fire, after some little while, mightily heartened and refreshed, what was my surprise and indignation to feel his arms enfold me very ungently, his rude hands clasping and squeezing my tender sides.

"Good lass!" quoth he. "To-morrow, without your busks and whalebones and what nots, you shall travel even easier than to-day. Now come and eat!"

And this night, lying with my sleepy eyes upturned to the myriad flaming lights that strewed the floor of heaven, I must needs think of his words—how God revealed Himself in the immensity of the wilderness about me and now (thinks I) if thus indeed the Spirit of God be all about me, what cause have I to fear it, nor even the beasts that prowled and snarled in its dark solitudes, since these were of God ... and if I must indeed perish, then, being also of God, back to His cherishing my weary soul must fly.

Lulled by which comforting thought I sank to sweet and dreamless slumber.

CHAPTER XXV

SHOWETH HOW I RETURNED GOOD FOR EVIL

This morning I waked very early to find the sun just a-peep and upon the world a great quietude, a deep and solemn hush,—not a leaf rustled in the warm, still air, not a bird piped and in the leagues of tangled forests about us nothing stirred; it seemed that all created things slumbered.

And something of this universal peace stole into my own heart, so that instead of repining against my fate or frowning upon this new day that, as I knew, must bring me further travail, I sat up and looked about me with a new interest. And the first thing I looked upon was this man, this Japhet who lay within a yard of me beside the smouldering fire, his outflung arm across his sword and pistols; and his brown face (its scowling grimliness all smoothed away in the deep unconsciousness of slumber) showing, methought, strangely young and of an unexpected comeliness. From him I glanced where sprawled the Earl, his visage all asprout with beard and hair; and this set me wondering why Japhet must trouble to shave himself and in the wilderness! And thinking I knew the reason, I smiled and reaching my brush, comb, etc., whence I had laid them ready overnight, I rose and crept away to bathe me in that little placid pool I have mentioned, nor did I hurry myself about so joyous a business: thus I had just donned my gown, now woefully travel-worn and with cruel rents here and there, when I heard furious babble of voices,—Japhet's fierce and harsh, the Earl's high-pitched and mocking, and then sounds of desperate strife. Hastily donning my shoes, back fled I running and saw them buffeting each other very spitefully, but Japhet so much the quicker that or ever I might interpose, his cruel fist smote the Earl violently to earth, where he lay half dead, his hairy face dreadfully bespattered with blood.

"Murderous wretch!" cried I, and kneeling beside the stricken man, I began to wipe his marred face with my tattered gown.

"Fool wench, let be!" cried the Captain. "Must you foul yourself with his vile blood ... such beastly contamination,—let be!" And seizing me in vicious grip, he dragged me to my feet.

"Beast!" I panted. "You've killed him at last."

"Have I so, ma'm? Then here's to revive him!" quoth he, and thrusting me aside, he began to kick the Earl's inanimate form, whereupon this poor tormented gentleman, that I had thought dead or at least aswoon, leapt very nimbly to his feet and gasping fierce invective, sprang desperately into the dense thickets and was gone; and now when I, driven beyond endurance by such barbarity would have followed, the Captain snatched me back and I struggling and beating at him till I was whirled face down across his knee.... Of his shameful usage of me I will not write, but when at last he freed me, smarting with his blows and shamed to the very soul, I would in my madness have killed him to avenge my outraged womanhood and, like any wild creature, leapt where lay his pistols, but ere I might reach one, he had snatched up his sheathed sword and, pinning me again, beat me therewith until (despite all my resolution) I screamed for very pain.... Then I was free and turning to revile him stood dumb, for there within a yard of us stood the Earl and in each hand the Captain's pistols.

"Stand away from him, Ursula," says he, "and watch a rogue die!" And so for a moment was a deadly stillness while these two men stared on each other.

Then Lord Aldbourne, white teeth agleam 'twixt hairy lips, spoke again, soft-voiced, smiling:

"Stand aside, Ursula, lest the powder scorch you!"

Almost as he spoke and ere either of them might guess my intent, I leapt full at the Earl,—blinding flame and smoke, a deafening report and I, half stunned, conscious of two forms that swayed to and fro above me in fierce grapple ... I heard a groan, saw one fall with arms wide tossed ... then a face was touching mine—Japhet's face—his arms were fast about me ... arms no longer cruel and hands that stroked and patted me caressingly and in my ear his voice:

"My beautiful ... my brave love...." And thus upon his breast, cradled in his embrace, I closed my eyes and swooned away (or very nearly). And what he murmured to my seeming unconscious ears, I will not write, though I was to think of it for ever after—more especially when aught of trouble or danger threatened.

CHAPTER XXVI

TELLETH HOW JAPHET SAVED HIS ENEMY FROM DEATH MOST HORRID

And when methought my swoon had accomplished all I might reasonably expect, I opened my eyes, making their expression reproachful as I might.

"The Earl—what of him?" I questioned faintly.

"Safe shackled—damn him, he well-nigh killed you!"

"And you ... beat me!" said I, in weeping voice.

"Ay, I did," he murmured.

"Are you not ashamed to have so ... so profaned me with ... your cruel hand?"

"No!" he answered, folding me closer, "there can be no shame 'twixt you and me henceforth, save dishonour. You risked your life for me—so is my life yours and myself truly at your command."

"Yet you must beat me," I reproached him, "and with your sword, beside."

"Ay, faith," said he, sighing deeper than ever, "for this I do abhor myself...." And here he falls to such talk of my tender loveliness, etc., as it becomes me not to set down.

"Mine is not the nature that taketh kindly to such brutal chastisement," sighed I.

"No," he murmured, very humbly, "and yet you leapt 'twixt me and death!" And here he kissed me full upon the lips, the which so greatly disconcerted me, I knew not what to say until, freeing myself of his arms, I rose to my feet, somewhat unsteadily, and then, or ever I might speak, I beheld near-by the Earl, bleeding and helpless in his shackles, flashing his teeth at me in a mocking smile.

"So, my lady, you prove the adage true—that dog, woman and walnut tree, the more you whip them the better they be. 'Tis knowing rascal, our pirate."

"Sir," I retorted, "your speech is odious as your looks; come then and I will bathe your poor, bruised face." At this he arose forthwith and bowing very lowly:

"Madam Ursula," says he, "such reproof toucheth me sensibly; I crave your pardon."

"Then come and be washed, this moment!" said I... And now as he knelt beside the stream to my ministrations (the Captain watching us 'neath drawn brows as he recharged his pistol), I could not help but smile to think what children they both were (though of large growth, to be sure), and therefore determined henceforth to keep peace between them and despite themselves.

And when my lord had donned his pack and the Captain girded on his sword and pistols, we set out on our journey through a country that this morning seemed, as it were, to enfold me in its warm loveliness; yet I was soon to learn how hatefully false was this beauty and what loathly terrors and abomination of horror lay hid beneath this so beauteous seeming: as shall be told.

We had climbed a hill and from this eminence there burst upon me such scene of beauty as made me exclaim for sheer joy of it; mile on mile of blossoming thickets all ablaze with varied colours and beyond this the dark mystery of vast forests, these too splashed here and there with glorious hues and, beyond these again, the blue of ocean, a vast expanse where no ship sailed.

"Oh, the wonder of it!" I cried.

"Ay," Japhet nodded, "But look you yonder, there and there again!" and he pointed where in the valley below and hard beside this Indian track we followed, showed patches of vivid, lovely green.

"What is it?" I questioned.

"Death!" he answered, "So walk you where I walk. And yon, ye lubberly mumps, yonder be quags, so tread warily. I would not lose our dunnage,—d'ye hear?"

"Ay, I hear," sighed my lord patiently.

So down went we into this valley that looked so fair and pleasantly vernal and I taking great heed to my feet and treading where he trod and close upon his heels.

We had gone thus some little distance when I heard sudden outcry behind us and, turning about, saw the Earl had stumbled from the path and was being sucked down very horribly in a green slime, so that instinctively I reached out my hands to his succour. Then Japhet was before me, holding me back and looking down, smiling in cruel glee.

"So there y'are, Johnny!" he chuckled, "And dying by inches! How doth it feel, Dog's-meat?" The Earl groaned, floundering more desperately, his features convulsed with such agony of horror as I hope and pray never to see again; and Japhet smiling down on him with such look as appalled me.

"Japhet!" I cried, beside myself with the terror of it, "save him, for God's sake ... for your own sake! Oh, Japhet, show pity on him ... forget your wicked vengeance—"

"Peace, woman!" he answered, "It is very well that he should suffer somewhat—"

"Mercy!" gasped the Earl, his desperate struggles growing weaker, his dreadful eyes outstarting from his haggard, sweat-streaked face; and then, as I think, he swooned, for uttering a great cry, he bowed his head and strove no more. Then laying by his pistols and unbuckling sword-belt, Japhet reached out and grasped him by the hair and seizing hold upon an out-jutting branch, began to drag his swooning foe from that noisome, clutching slime when, to my further horror, the branch snapped and Japhet himself was floundering in that green death.

"Japhet!" I gasped, reaching down my hands to him.

"No, no!" said he, pale, yet marvellous undismayed. "The rope ... pay it about the sapling yonder and ... comrade, be speedy." And indeed he was sinking fast and yet somehow contriving to keep the Earl's head above that ravenous, whispering ooze.

"Oh, but where ... where is the rope?" cried I, running to and fro, questing like one distraught.

"About thy ... pretty middle!" he gasped and even in this dread moment smiled up at me. So I took the rope of salvation and securing it about the tree, set it within his reach.

"But ... dear God ... you have but one hand!" I wailed.

"It shall serve us!" he panted; as indeed it did. For as I knelt there, alternate crying to him and praying to God, slowly and by painful degrees he won within my reach.

And now while his powerful hand inched along the rope, I grasped his arm, that cracked and quivered beneath the strain. I heard his breath come and go in terrible groaning gasps, but slowly, surely, he won free of that clinging death and with the swooning Earl safe beside him, lay with closed eyes, like one on the point of death; yet when I bent over him in fearful panic lest this should indeed be so, he looked up at me to gasp:

"Lost ... both ... my shoes!" After this, so soon as he might, he arose and out of the mud-spattered pack he takes my cloak, wherefrom he tore strips to bind about his feet, bidding the Earl do likewise: for when I would have had him make camp here and rest after his prodigious exertions:

"Zounds—no!" says he. "Here fevers shall creep o' night; no, we must on to the highlands, so sheet home and square away, shipmate." And now, to my no small wonder, he slings the great pack to his own shoulders, and when the Earl (still weak and shaken by his dread experience) protested himself able to this duty:

"Tush, Johnny," says he gruffly, "you would but hamper us or tumble into another quag." So on we went and weary tramp we made of it and both of them limping ere we came on what we sought,—to wit, a little waterfall that lured us with its

sweet babblement.

And now it was I who lit the fire and set about preparing supper, in the midst of which, seeing him watch me where he sat leaning wearily against a rock, said I:

"How shall you go and no shoes?"

"Turn cobbler!" he answered. "Hey, Crow's-bait, if ye've the strength, bring hither the satchel." Up rose my lord and though staggering with weariness brought it on the instant and as instantly sank down all asprawl and looking like death, what with the dusk and fitful firelight.

And now, with his sharp seaman's knife, Japhet cuts him pieces of leather from the satchel, shapes them, slits them and begins to sew them with large needle and thread and what he told me sailormen call a "palm", and all with such speed and deftness that soon he had made a shoe, very rough to be sure, yet very admirable, as I told him.

"Why, 'twill serve until we can get better from the Indians," said he.

And now, supper being ready, I summoned them thereto: and to-night, myself being cook, Lord Aldbourne ate with us. Also this night, and for a wonder, the Captain suffered him to lie unshackled.

Now when I had washed and stowed away the utensils, I stretched myself in sheltered corner and watched the quick, sure play of Japhet's hands where he crouched busied with his task.

"So you become shoemaker to the Earl!" said I softly, seeing his lordship lay already fast asleep.

"Ay, ma'm, the fool lost his also."

"And you saved him from dreadful death in the morass."

"Ay, ma'm, 'tis for worse death I saved him."

"No death could be more dreadful than that."

"Oh, I think so, lass, I think so," said he, nodding at the half-finished shoe in his fingers. "A slave dieth slower beneath the lash."

"Japhet, are you such implacably cruel man as you sound?"

"Think me worse, ma'm, and you'll come somewhere nigh the truth o' me."

"Hath the Earl indeed wronged you so greatly?"

"Ask him."

"Are you a man must for ever cherish the memory of your wrongs?"

"Well, and why not—having naught else to cherish?"

"Unhappy wretch!" said I.

"Oh, get you to sleep!" quoth he, and mighty surly; whereat, to be sure, I instantly sat up to tell him that, though he had made me the victim of his coarse brutality that morning, the odious blows he had made me then endure shamed him beyond redemption and that such nature as mine should never tamely submit to such savagery.

"Why harp on it, lass, why harp, except you'm minded to be so victimized again? Say the word and we'll to 't forthwith, and with heart and hand. What now? Are ye dumb? Then stow thy whids, hold thy clack and, since ye talk o' savagery, of savages I'll tell thee, though of another sort. Though how mere savages should build them mighty cities and drive them mighty roads athwart vasty ravines and through mountains, roads fine as any ever made by the old Romans,—all this passeth my understanding."

And forthwith (though to be sure, I yawned in his face) he begins to tell me of this wondrous people called Inca; of their wondrous goldsmith work, how they can fashion sprays of flowers in gold and silver natural as life and with the simplest

tools: and shall cast you images of birds, beasts and fishes in all sorts of postures, everything so curious as they had been alive. Then of their vasty temples and sumptuous palaces which, considering their builders had no use of iron nor any of those instruments and engines used by our masons, was the more amazing. But above all (saith he) the fort or citadel of the great city of Cuzco surpasseth imagination, the stones of it so immense that none may conceive how they could be dug out of the quarries without the aid of iron, nor transported so many leagues over such mountains and uncouth ways, and all without the help of horses, oxen, sledges or other conveniences, since these were all unknown. All this and more he recounted, stitching away at his shoes, and I (forgetting to yawn) was fain to hear more, as I told him.

"Why some of these wonders shalt see for thyself," says he, "for though Yupanaqui's city is none so great as Cuzco, 'tis well enough, and despite the curst Spaniards many of these mighty buildings yet endure, their great stones so nicely joined you shall not get knife point betwixt 'em; yet these folk, Ursula, had no squares, rules, cranes or the like for raising and fitting them in place."

Thus talked he awhile until, the shoes finished, he rose, stretched himself wearily and having made up the fire, lay down 'twixt me and the sleeping Earl.

"And now to slumber," he sighed. "A fair good night to thee, Madam Bly." And I, making no answer to this, he chuckled and as I think, went to sleep. But as for me, I lay there, watching the fire and thinking upon all these marvels and wonders I was to see, yet when at last I sank to rest, what must I do but dream of—Japhet.



CHAPTER XXVII

TELLETH HOW OUR CAPTAIN DESERTED US

To describe this long journey day by day would doubtless prove wearisome to the reader in fancy as it was to me in fact; therefore, passing over much that I would fain relate yet may not, I will come to that day of our travel (the tenth, as I think) when I looked, as it seemed, into the very eyes of Death.

And because an all merciful Providence suffered me to live, needs must I pause here to pay humble tribute to that Mighty Creator of this wondrous universe and kindly God of our mortality that He hath endowed us poor, finite creatures with part of Himself, so that if we do but call upon Him in our extremity and second our prayer with effort sufficiently determined, He shall assuredly endow us with courage of mind and strength of body to meet all difficulties soever; yea, every hardship and peril triumphantly by reason of our faith in Him that is our Creator, and in ourselves because we are of Him. At the least, so was it with me, as shall now be related.

And I will begin this chapter with myself bathing me and the world aflame with dawn.

Thus then stood I, in rock-girt pool shut in by dense bush and thickets, stooping to behold myself in this crystal mirror and very sedulously, since my dread was lest this life of constant exposure, travel and hardship and going ever afoot, might indeed affect my limbs as he had prophesied, turning them into unsightly things all knobbed with muscle and my poor body to unshapely brawn and leanness; for this was the first time I had found opportunity to thus behold myself in very many days. And great was my surprise and content to find these carking fears all groundless; for here was no lumpishness of limb nor harsh, unlovely haggardness of body; nay, indeed all was much the reverse, for what with this open-air life and freedom of habit I found myself show so very nearly all I would be, that I fell a-singing to myself—and then caught my breath and stood dumb to see two eyes peering at me amid the green.

"Aha—Venus!" exclaimed Lord Aldbourne, parting the leaves with very hateful assurance. "Phryne, Aspasia, and the golden, glorious Helen—" Then a brown hand was choking him and behind him were Japhet's fierce eyes, so down plunged I into the pool and they to instant furious conflict.

And when he had dragged the Earl away, I dressed myself hastily and, coming to our camping place, beheld Lord Aldbourne shackled to a tree and Japhet belabouring him with a rope's end.

And after I thought this merited castigation had endured long enough, I ventured to interfere, whereat he turned on me in such black rage as much astonished but nothing daunted me.

"How now, ma'm Venus!" cried he in bitter mockery. "Do I thus afflict one o' your Paphian Majesty's favoured worshippers? Doth Phryne—ha, damme—do you stand thus on exhibition of a morning to the delectation of this peeping fine gentleman, whiles poor Japhet lies a-snoring—"

Now at this shameful lying suggestion I actually blenched; then finding no words for adequate rejoinder I caught up a stout stick that chanced handy and smote my villainous traducer so heartily therewith that it flew asunder.

"What, some o' my own medicine—?" he began, but I stopped him with a gesture.

"Japhet," said I, looking into his hated eyes, "you know me for no such shameless wanton and therefore you also know yourself for the base liar I pronounce you! Now take yourself out o' my sight ... go and rid me of the shame of you!"

"Go, is it?" he jeered, "and leave you to Dog's-meat yonder?"

"Ay, to him! To death! To anything! I had rather consort with wild beasts and lie with loathsome toads and adders than such thing as yourself. Go now or I will."

"How—leave you ... here in the wilderness? Fool woman; without me you will perish."

"Vile man," I retorted, "there be worse things than death and you are one of these—go!"

"Hum!" quoth he, shaking his head at me. "This is spleen! A megrim or fit o' your ladylike vapours! Easy, lass, take that hoity-toity look off your face and bid me stay and—"

"Go—go!" cried I. "And may the devil take you for wicked liar!"

For a moment he stood looking at me like one deliberating on two courses, then, without another word or look, he belted sword and pistols about him, shouldered his musket and was gone; nor did I move or speak until my Lord Aldbourne addressed me:

"Ursula," says he, staring on me in wide-eyed dismay, "what a God's name have you done?"

"Ay—what?" I murmured.

"You've wrought our deaths, madam, for without yon rogue we must certainly perish, as he said, damn him!"

"Why then," quoth I, sinking down all sudden weak, "at the least we can die but once." Yet, despite my brave words, I shuddered very miserably; but, upon the very brink of tears, the sight of my companion drooping in his bonds waked me to new vigour.

"Wretch!" quoth I scornfully. "To creep and pry on me so contemptibly like any pitiful, callow youth 'stead of right man; 'twas yourself brought this on us!"

"Ay—I do confess it!" sighed he. "But why should I thus demean myself, think ye?"

"Because you are no more than you are," I answered wearily, "but what matter now?"

"As you will, madam. But let me confess—though I dote on beauty, 'twas not so much to gloat on yours as to plague this damnable Japhet fellow—to see him writhe in torment on the rack o' jealousy—"

"Jealousy!" I repeated, almost whispering.

"Ay! Faith, there is no sharper torment to your proud spirit than jealousy. And knowing he loveth you so slavishly, I played on this whenso I might ... stealing after you as if with such foul intent, and the fool up and after me—"

"And how are you sure he—loves me so—slavishly?"

"Tush, madam, you know this. Besides, I have not always slept o' night when I seemed, and I've watched him hang over you as you slept ... touch your feet ... kiss your gown—in fine, a sorry lovesick, calfish rogue—"

"Oh!" said I and "Yes! And this was at night whiles I slept... Were there any other ... like fooleries?"

"Why now, I should talk more at ease would you free me of these accursed fetters. I can show you the trick of them."

Scarce had I freed him of these hateful things than he snatched them up and hurled them to fall jingling far among the flowery thickets; which done, he bowed to me.

"For this relief, much thanks!" said he and motioning me to be seated, sat down beside me in the shade, saying:

"And now the question is—what to do? For indeed we are in very parlous case, Ursula."

"We are indeed!" sighed I. "Our plight is so truly desperate that I am determined to bide here awhile."

"Ay, but why?"

"Because I think he will come back for us."

"But why, a God's name, should he?"

"Because for very shame he cannot thus desert us ... leave us to perish."

"But Lord, ma'm, you bade him begone in no uncertain fashion."

"Well and having gone, he should have come back again, and so I do believe he will."

"'Tis vain hope, I fear, Ursula. Rather let us decide how best to act in this extremity, as—whether to go on, go back, or make for the coast."

"When we go it shall be forward, my lord."

"Why, I suppose one direction is good as another, though for my part I—" He checked suddenly and looking whither he stared, my poor heart leaped and seemed to stand still for, scowling at us from the adjacent thicket was a tall, plumed Indian and in his hand a bow.

CHAPTER XXVIII

TELLETH HOW WE ARE BORNE AWAY BY INDIANS

For a long, breathless moment this fierce-looking barbarian stood motionless, save that his bright eyes flashed from me to the Earl and back again; and thus I saw he wore a cloak of feathers fastened with golden clasp, about his head was golden circlet set with bright feathers, in his girdle a long knife or sword, hafted with gold, and upon his feet long shoes or buskins of soft hide with latchets of gold, so that methought he must be some great personage. Nor was my estimation wrong it seemed for, speaking no word, he gestured suddenly with his bow and as suddenly befeathered warriors were all about us.

What wild terror possessed me in this moment no word may tell, but dissembling my fears, I rose with what dignity I might and though my knees quaked woefully, contrived to salute this lordly Indian with my stateliest curtsy, making the most of my poor tattered gown; also, thinking it might better dispose him towards us, I spoke (and boldly as I could) the name I had learned from Japhet, pronouncing it as he had:

"Capac Yupanaqui." And great was my wonder and satisfaction to see how these Indians every one abased themselves, hands reached forth palms down, as in salutation to this dread and mighty name, insomuch that I held myself proudly as I might, like one expectant of obedience rather than as humble suppliant or the poor, terrified creature I really was. And now to me cometh the tall chief, this stately man, and speaks me in deep musical voice and with many graceful gestures, though all to no purpose so that, smiling up at him, I shook my head:

"Espagnol?" he questioned, pointing first to me then the Earl, who stood beside me something pale yet showing much at his ease, none the less. "Espagnol?" says the chief again.

"No!" I answered, frowning and shaking my head as the mere suggestion were abhorrent to me. "No,—English!" said I.

"Inglesi!" he nodded, then touching himself on the breast, "Huayana Tupac Ayabuaca!" saith he; whereupon I immediately curtsied to him again, and pointing to my own breast, named myself, the which he pronounced after me and very plainly considering:

"Urs—sla!" says he and points to the Earl.

"Lord Aldbourne!" I answered, whereupon he shook his head as such name were beyond him and turning, called somewhat to his followers, whereupon they instantly vanished and I very anxiously wondering what now? But seeing their chief still look so friendly comforted me not a little. From this stately Indian I glanced where stood the Earl, a sorry, jaded, travel-worn figure by contrast, for he wore neither coat nor waistcoat, and though he had used my scissors to trim his hair and beard, he had botched it sadly; and yet, as he met my look, there was a high-bred, easy dignity about him notwithstanding.

"Hadst thy wits with thee, Ursula," said he, "your Inca's name is potent, 'twould seem. Faith, that head o' thine is a useful ornament and may save us yet, or at least,—the better of us!" And he favoured me with a graceful bow, whereat comes the chief and looking from one to other of us bows likewise, then,

"Capac Yupanaqui!" saith he and pointing to the sun holds up four fingers.

"Now what on earth shall he mean, think you?" questioned the Earl.

"Well," I answered thoughtfully, "first he shows us the sun and then four fingers—what can this mean but four days?"

"Slife, Ursula, I believe you've hit it! To be sure,—in four days' journey he shall bring us to this Inca Capa what's-a-name. Ay, but—how then? This methinks is indeed—the question,—what? Nay, child, why must you be for ever scanning the path yonder? Art grieving for your plaguey Captain, damn him?"

"But surely," said I. "Oh, surely he will not ... he cannot have deserted us so heartlessly!"

"Well, but he hath, child." And yet, in despite of my companion's words, nay, the very evidence of my own eyes, I still could not believe it,—expecting every moment to hear his voice, to see him looking at me with his so remembered,

quirkish smile; and this so wrought on me that turning to the chief:

"Huayana," said I, making my eyes eloquently plaintive as I might, "know you one Captain ... Japhet ... Bly?"

Having listened to me pronounce the name very deliberately twice over Huayana gravely shook his head and then back came his Indians, bearing something betwixt a sailor's hammock and a sedan chair fashioned very cunningly and slung upon stout poles.

"Aha, two of them!" murmured the Earl. "Zounds, Ursula, thanks to your wit we shall journey in state, wherever it be."

Obedient to Huayana's stately gesture, we mounted into these machines and away we went, each borne by four Indians, and very comfortable I found myself, so that I must needs admire how these, that I had esteemed mere savages, could construct such carriages so wondrously and so soon.

I wondered also to see at what speed we went, my bearers keeping pace to an ambling trot that never seemed to tire and the motion so pleasant that I might have slept but that I must be for ever looking this way and that, hoping and expecting to catch sight of a certain lithe, travel-stained figure that yet I never saw.

Hour after hour we travelled thus, pausing only to change bearers; and often I would catch glimpses of the great mountain through the dense foliage for it seemed we had reached the forest country, this same mountain, showing ever vaster, grander and loftier, that he had told me was called Hualpa, in whose shadow was the Inca's city though its name I could not call to mind, try as I would. Chancing to catch Huayana looking towards me, I beckoned and pointing to this great mountain.

"Hualpa, Huayana!" said I, whereupon and for the first time, he smiled, and a sad and wistful smile I thought it.

"Hualpa," he answered; and then with sweep of his long arm that somehow expressed to me a sense of size and power.

"Viracocha ... Capac Yupanaqui!" said he, with much beside that I could make nothing of, though I smiled on him engagingly as possible.

The sun was high above us when from somewhere in the dense forest about us rose a shrill, long-drawn, quavering scream so wild and unearthly as chilled me with a sick dread and what added to my fear was to see how our Indians had halted, every one, and now stood mute and still as so many graven images; then spake Huayana and drawing his sword vanished amid the thick boskage, vanished silently with his company, save for our eight bearers, who crouched about our carriages, silent also and grimly alert and each with an arrow on his bowstring. Now presently from the forest came sounds of battle, shouts, screams, gasps, yet no din of gunfire so that I judged it was not Spaniards who attacked us. And after a while those dread sounds lulled, faded away and back came Huayana, his left arm red with blood from a great gash below the elbow, the which he was endeavouring to staunch with a handful of leaves. Now, seeing how carelessly he did this, I sprang from my litter and took the leaves from him (and all sodden with his blood) and tearing a strip from my poor gown, bound this firmly above his hurt, thereby checking the bleeding, and he watching mighty placid; then finding him insistent about the leaves, I set these upon the wound, binding them firmly in place. Scarce was this done than taking my hand he touches it to his brow, louting to me in stately fashion; then showing me his sword, its blade horridly stained.

"Chachapuya ... Ayamara!" says he and pointing to his stained blade, held up three fingers, whereby I judged three of our enemies had died thereby. And now he hands me back into my carriage with as much courtly grace as any fine gentleman in St. James', or anywhere else.

And here I would record of these Indians how they are neither red nor yellow but of a tender, glowing russet hue, their features pleasingly regular, their eyes large and well set, their teeth very white and even, their hair long and glossy black, their limbs well-shaped and very quick and active. Indeed, many of their skins showed fairer than Japhet's dark, sun-tanned visage: and it was of him I was thinking, and for him my anxious glance was questing as I was borne on through these forest ways.

And little by little there grew on me a certainty that he must be taken prisoner by some of these roving Indians, or lying somewhere in these hateful solitudes sore hurt and none to help, or dead and beyond all human aid: for with every laggard hour sure was I in my heart that, with all his hatefulness, Japhet was not the man to leave me in such heartless fashion so miserably to perish. And now I must bethink me of the Earl's words anent Japhet's fierce jealousy and of his

"slavish love": I pictured myself at night deep in slumber beside the camp fire and Japhet "hanging over me" ... or reaching to touch my weary, all unconscious feet ... or stooping to kiss my poor, worn gown ... to kiss it and I all unknowing!... And my heart swelled with such strange pain, such agony of regret, that I bowed my head and covering my face wept as I had never wept in all my days. Now presently, hearing voices and looking up, I saw a rocky eminence beside the way and thereupon four plumed chiefs, their gold ornaments gleaming bravely in the westering sun, and in their midst, grim and shabby by contrast whom should I see, and through my bitter tears, but Japhet himself, leaning upon his musket and looking down into my eyes with his half-mocking, quirkish smile.

CHAPTER XXIX

TELLS HOW I FOUND MYSELF WIFE TO A GOD

Here I must needs remark how vain and strangely contradictory is this human nature of ours (or mine own, at least) that it shall make us yearn and weep, nay, peril our very existence for that which, seeming out of our reach, becometh therefore the very ideal and full perfection of our dreams; yet once it be achieved and thus familiar, showeth so flawed we instantly dispraise it—or seem to so do.

Thus then, no sooner did I behold him all safe and unharmed than, forgetting all my late woeful grief, I could but think how basely the cruel wretch had deserted me; so when he came hasting to greet me, I accorded him the coldest of welcomes.

"Well, ma'm," said he, his smile fading, "our Huayana found you then?"

"Ay, by Heaven's kind mercy, sir," I answered frigidly.

"And my directions, ma'm."

"Oh!" said I, like one vastly amazed, "You sent him?"

"Ay!" he nodded. "But wherefore the astonishment?"

"'Tis but natural."

"Tush!" quoth he, scowling, "Why quibble? You knew in your secret woman's heart I could never leave you to perish, and such miserable death."

"You left me!" said I, matching his frown with one as sullen.

"Ay, ma'm, 'twas that or inflicting on you further corporal punishment and, having deliberated the matter, I spared your person, though unwillingly, and went forward to meet Huayana."

"Well, but how should you be sure of so meeting him?"

"Smoke signals, ma'm. Howbeit you have contrived to win Huayana's high esteem, which is very well, for he is a mighty powerful cacique."

"Cacique?" I questioned.

"An overlord. Now come your ways and meet others of these caciques."

"And my poor gown scarce decent!" I mourned.

"But you've a face, ma'm, and a stately presence, or shall I say a prideful arrogance? And 'tis such like these caciques shall heed, for they being Indian lords, to wit gentlemen by nature, they see beyond the husk of things. And lookee, Ursula, there be fools do name them savages, barbarians and the like!" So he brought me to these stately men who, with many words beyond my understanding and graceful gestures as told me as much as any words might, gave me welcome. After this he brings me to a green bower where bubbled a rill and here a hut wonderously contrived with osiers, shaped like a great beehive of wattle and all decked about with flowers, and inside a bed, stools, table, etc., to my comfort, so that I could not but cry out for delight and wonder of it.

"But," says I, beholding all this, "how long must I live here?"

"Until to-morrow; we march in the cool of dawn."

"But all this for so short a time?"

"Ay, 'twas the work of many hands," saith he and beckoning me where I might peep down through flowery vines, I beheld a great green hollow where stood other like osier hutments, though none so large or pretty as mine; and here very many

men who talked softly with no sound of shout or song or laughter, and upon my remarking on this, he tells me it is ever so, these being a soft-spoken people by nature and moreover the last of a race hath endured much of wrong and cruelty at the hands of the oppressors to wit—the Spaniards.

And now, I seated upon one of my stools and he outstretched upon the ling, he takes out pipe and tobacco and lighting it with his tinderbox, begins puffing smoke with dreamy content (as I had seen him do once or twice aboard ship) and the which methought a very coarse and loose habit, as I told him.

"Why, 'tis more comforting than snuff, ma'm," says he, "besides, my snuff's all gone, so by your gracious leave, I'll puff."

"Pray," says I, "how comes it you're so great among these Indians?"

"Oh, madam," saith he, smiling at me through the blue wreaths of his tobacco, "these so wise children of Nature properly see and esteem poor Japhet at his true worth."

"Surely 'tis because of the talisman you bear—the gold skull?"

"This!" said he clapping hand to the leathern bag girt about him and that (as I think I have writ) he was never without.

"No, Ursula, the time for this is not yet. But on me I bear another talisman and no less potent among these Inca folk."

"Pray you show me!" Hereupon he unbuttoned his weather-stained jerkin, and baring his chest (that methought strangely white) showed me etched and stained thereon, a pattern I took to be a daisy flower but which he told me was a radiate sun, being the Inca symbol of royalty and the godhead.

"Why then, you are royal among these people?"

"Ay, I am!" he nodded. "And, what is more, a god."

Now at this I could but look my amazement and incredulity whereat he chuckled very boyishly.

"How doth it feel to be spouse of a royal god?" he questioned.

"A god!" I repeated. "You?"

"Verily!" he nodded, puffing his pipe. "And gifted with power of life and death, as a god would be. Say but the word, ma'm, and at my order you shall watch men die very painfully to your pleasure, for these Indians, despite their mild seeming, be very expert torturers."

"But you ... you are an Englishman."

"Ay, but blood brother to the Inca, with power second but to his. So here, an' I make you truly my wife, you shall live a very queen. And how say you to this?"

"That 'stead of such queen I had rather be an English housewife."

"Yet this is a fair country, Ursula."

"Yet I love England far better, Japhet."

"Your England is no place for me, madam."

"You fear they shall hang you for piracy?"

"I know it, madam."

"Yet there is my home!" says I, sighing, whereat he snorted contemptuous.

"Home?" quoth he bitterly. "'Sdeath, woman, you don't know the meaning o' the word! You've no home in England; you've a house there, you've lands and what not, but how then? It is not roof and walls that make home, no nor company of sottish uncle and witless aunt."

"Sir, I think you grow impertinent."

"Madam, I speak truth,—and here's more! A wife's home is in the arms of her husband, or should be. Well now, suppose I compel you to come home?"

"Then, 'stead of wife, I should be your slave, hating you and a misery to myself—"

"Yourself!" he repeated scornfully. "Always and forever you, yours, or yourself. How an I too should think but of myself? What is to prevent me forcing you to my will?"

"Yourself!" I answered.

"Ha, damme," he exclaimed, flushing angrily, "will you mock me then?"

"God forbid!" said I, very meekly humble. "I do but recall the promise you gave me such little while ago. 'Twas when the Earl made to shoot you and nigh killed me instead. Well, have you forgot how you vowed your life was mine henceforth and pledged yourself to be ever truly at my command? And 'tis certain you will keep your pledge, because you are a gentleman and—"

"Thankee for nothing!" quoth he. "No, no, I am a god and, being thus sublime, do soar above all promises soever. And how say you to this?"

"That whatsoever other you may be, you are and always will be—Japhet!" And here I gave him such look that he flushed again and this time not with anger.

"So poor Japhet is to be put upon his honour, eh, ma'm?" said he, rising and looking at his tobacco pipe that had gone out. "Well, to-night he is a god and proffers such power and splendour as you shall never have without him. So if ye be so minded,—sing out, ma'm, and thy god shall come and make o' thee—his goddess."

With which he turned and left me. So then went I and bathed and combed out my hair, that seemed prodigious grown. And after this they brought me supper, goat's flesh, as I think, spiced and seasoned with strange herbs and vegetables that I thought very delectable, and served in covered dish of wondrous design that I found afterwards to be of gold. Indeed, I later found they use this so precious metal very commonly and seem little to esteem it.

And after some while, being weary, I got me to bed, but then despite my languor I lay broad awake and thus unable to close my eyes, watched through the open doorway of my little house, how stately rose the moon and in such splendour that the flaming stars paled to her glory; and thus I presently rose and donning shoes and gown, went forth to walk in her tender radiance and drink deep of the cool, spicy breath of night.

Now the moon being low as yet, cast long shadows and among these shadows I saw one that moved and as it came nearer saw this was Japhet; and I found myself holding my breath very oddly as I watched him approach. He was walking slowly and his head was bowed as in deep reverie and I wondering what should bring him hither at such hour and to what intent.

Being come opposite my little lodge, he paused and then began to approach it at the same leisured pace and with no precaution of furtive stealth; and this pleased me strangely. Reaching the doorway, he peered within and seeing my bed vacant, began to look about in all directions and with a very evident anxiety until, espying me at last, he came hasting; and then all he said, and that very gently, was:

"Well?"

"I ... did not call or ... 'sing out' for you!" said I.

"Not with your lips," quoth he in the same soft tone; whereat I must needs feel myself flushing like some guilty wretch,—very fool like.

"Then why must you come thus seeking me?" I demanded.

"Madam Bly, you mistake," says he, and shook his head at me reprovingly, "hither came no potent god to seek and snatch reluctant goddess; no no,—here is only poor Japhet Bly seeking answer to a problem."

"Yet you peeped in at my bed!"

"Ay, ma'm. But as cat may look at king, so poor Japhet would ha' peeped at spouse."

"And you find her enthralled by the magic of the night."

"Ay, and sitting under tree, which is not altogether wise. Trees hereabouts do sometimes harbour grimly tenants."

At this, I descended from my perch in fashion extreme hasty and undignified; whereupon he must murmur something anent the "speedful beauty of Atalanta's legs."

"So you have grubbed among the Classics, Sir Pirate?" says I, shaking my scanty garments about me.

"A little, ma'm, a little,—between my throat-slitting business!" And now we were walking side by side, very close together and (for the time being) in a kinder fellowship than had ever been betwixt us ere now.

"And what is the problem keeps you thus wakeful?" I questioned.

"The Indians, and yourself, Ursula."

"Oh!" says I; and then: "Prithee, what of poor me?"

"Nay, first the Indians," said he, very grave and thoughtful. "To-morrow most like will be battle, except I can by desperate chance avert it. For in the forests afore us do lie strong companies of the Chachapuya with their allies the Ayamara."

"Why, 'twas some of these fought with Huayana as we came," said I.

"Ay, so he told me, Ursula, and how you tended his hurt. Well now, these be predatory tribes very warlike, that for the present have cast in their lot with the Spaniards, though—and mark you this—at one time they and these Aztecs were one great race. Now, Ursula, my problem is this,—whether to adventure me among them, trusting to win them to their old loyalty by this talisman of the Inca's skull; and if this be right in me to run aught of hazard, considering you lie in my care and helpless as any babe in this wild country?"

"The answer is manifest and simple," said I, "most decidedly—no!"

"Ay, there it is!" he sighed. "And yet ... could I but win these tribes back to their old allegiance ... here would be many lives saved, and my good Capac Yupanaqui more able to the defence of his ill-used people."

"But even to attempt this would set your life to great hazard?" said I.

"Somewhat!" he admitted. "But, Lord, I have perilled it so often ere now that—"

"That you shall never hazard it so lightly again!" said I, mighty determined.

"Indeed, ma'm, and why, pray?"

"Because I am your responsibility and intend to be even more so."

"As how, Ursula?"

"Thus, sir,—if to any purpose good or ill you jeopardize your life henceforth, you shall peril mine also. Thus, Captain Japhet Bly, be warned! If you go among these fierce tribes, I go with you!"

"Now, God love thee!" said he, almost whispering. "Hast no fear of death, Ursula?"

"Indeed, yes!" said I, shuddering. "I do fear it so greatly that if I am to die I had rather meet it with you beside me than alone or amid strangers. Howbeit, if you run this danger, I vow by my honour you shall take me with you."

We had paused beneath the outflung branch of a tree for a moment and when he spoke it was in tone so humbly reverent as touched me to an awed yet joyful wonderment.

"You!" he murmured. "With your dauntless soul ... your faith in me ... with you beside me, how should I think of failure? What queen you could make me ... for we might rule these people ... found a dynasty or ... choosing the easier way,

content us with a home ... and each other!... Ursula?" said he and the word a question, while in his eyes spoke that which set my heart a-beating and my knees a-tremble.

"Ursula!" said he again and reached forth his arms to me. And in these outstretched arms I sensed all the joys, the sweet pains, doubts and fears, and the thousand blissful cares and anxieties that go to make the woman's life when she is wife and mistress of a home. And now, when I would have spoken, I could not, and ere I might move, something touched my hair like a caress, and glancing up to know what this might be, I stood rigid with horror then screamed to see writhing thus upon me, its foul, glistening coils seeming all about me, the stark, monstrous evil of a great snake; one vision I had of it and then in this loathsome fashion as it seemed—death smote me.

CHAPTER XXX

TELLETH HOW THE GOLDEN SKULL WROUGHT A VERY MIRACLE

I was upon my bed and his arms fast about me and I so thankful to find myself alive I could have kissed him, yet did not. For presently, remembering the horror, a new and frightful dread seized me and this lest the snake had bitten me while I swooned and that I was sick and dying of its loathsome venom. So that or ever Japhet might prevent, I started up and away from him like a mad thing and Japhet after me, crying I knew not what; for my flesh was all a creep and, wild with affright and a too vivid imagination, I thought to feel the noxious poison tingling and burning in my veins, creeping nearer my heart ... stifling me.

"Oh, did it bite me—did it bite me?" I cried, and waiting for no answer, pleaded for air and presently found myself out beneath the stars, my burning cheek pillowed on the dewy earth, supplicating God that I might not die in such abominable fashion.

And after some time, this horror abating, to my relief came tears, then Japhet raised me in his arms and pillowing my head on his breast, stroked back my tumbled hair as any tender father might have done, calling God to witness the great snake had but touched me and that I was nowise harmed.

"Oh, Japhet," I sobbed, "oh, Japhet, take me away from this terrible country; back ... take me back to my dear, blessed England."

"Ay, I will, lass, I will," he promised.

"Swear me, Japhet ... swear you will carry me back to England so soon as you may."

"I swear it, Ursula!" And now, because I could nowise endure this place of horror, he bore me away to his own lodge where a small fire burned and in its comfort he laid me down. Presently he brought me somewhat in a cup, telling me it is a herbal infusion shall soothe and give me sweet easement of all my fears, and setting it to my lips bade me drink, the which I did, looking up into his eyes that showed so strangely gentle. And in this dark hour of terror and weakness I knew myself his for the taking; as I told him, "for," says I, drawing his arms about me and nestling me in their protection:

"Needs must be, Japhet, since without you I must die."

"Ay, true!" says he bitterly. "I am your salvation here in this wilderness. But 'sdeath, ma'm, I would not have a wife creep home to my arms, driven there by craven fear!"

"Art hatefully proud man, Japhet, I think!"

"Ay and yet—only a man!" said he, turning from me to scowl at the fire.

"Well, then," I murmured, "must thy poor wife humbly kneel to sue and supplicate thee?"

"Ay, lass, ay!" he growled in his gruff seaman's voice, "or let her come to him when the sun's over the mainyard and she her proudest, most fearless self; let her look into his eyes and speak him all her heart commands. So wait, lass—"

"And wherefore—not now, Japhet?"

"Because this, that now clings me in her arms, is not the real Ursula; 'tis creature hysteric, ma'm, a vapourish megrim that witched by fear ... the moon ... a passing emotion, would lure poor sailorman to that she shall not bear to think on to-morrow most like, for with the daylight cometh sanity, ma'm, and perchance a very ladylike remorse. So get you to sleep, poor frightened child—these eyes close—so!" And with his fingers, very gently, he closed my eyes.

Compelled thus and soothed by the potion, what could I do but obey....

And presently, as it seemed, methought I was back again and come safe aboard the *Joyful Deliverance*, rolling to a gentle sea, and knew great content therefore and sense of peace; but little by little I grew conscious this was no ocean that rocked me and, opening my eyes, saw I was being borne in my carriage with Indians all about me and, though I looked anxiously, no sign of Japhet. Now I saw the shady forest was behind us and before us a great open tract with

other woodlands afar, and beyond these, towering up and up in a sublime grandeur, the great mountain now so near that I could see, amid the dense forests that clothed its mighty slopes, the gleam and glitter of white water. I was yet gazing up at this awesome spectacle when my bearers stopped suddenly and no wonder, for, as though up-starting from the very earth, came very many other Indians, plumed like our Aztecs yet their faces and bodies hideously besmeared and painted; and as they advanced thus, very dreadfully threatening and warlike, I heard again that fierce, high-pitched quavering scream, that it seemed was their battle cry.

And now, as our Indians began setting themselves in posture of offence, I leapt from my carriage, determined to find Japhet at all hazards. And then I heard his voice loud and commanding, as I had often heard it ere now above the rush of wind and seas, though what he called I know not, since he spake some Indian dialect. And as he shouted thus, forth he stepped before our embattled array, and, all alone, began to walk towards these painted warriors that were advancing to our destruction.

Now seeing him thus so dreadfully solitary, I began to run nor stayed until I stood breathless at his side.

"Japhet!" I panted.

"Sweetheart!" he murmured, with quick smile and laugh like a sob. "I feared this of thee. Go back!"

"Not to loneliness!" said I, reaching him my hand.

"Yonder belike is death, Ursula!"

"Then I pray you hold fast my hand," said I, blenching, "never loose me whiles we live, Japhet."

"God love thee, comrade; come, then!" saith he, taking my trembling hand in his strong vital clasp. "Now make thy so sweet and shapely legs bear thee proud and boldly like a goddess, for goddess thou art and must be—'twas thus appeared the First Inca, Manco Capac, clasping the hand of his wife Coya Mama Oello Huaco; so will we face yon Chachapuya to win 'em to our will or hand in hand together die."

So thus we went together towards these grim ranks that advanced against us, screeching their battle cries in dreadful fashion, till, seeing we nothing heeded, they fell mute; and now, perceiving us come on at the same unhurried, stately pace, they halted to brandish their long lances and bend their bows against us.

"Now for it, sweetheart!" says he, giving my hand a squeeze. "Now shall we walk as gods or—kiss each other in death," then he raised his right hand and in it the golden skull of the Inca, crying in his clear, strong voice as he did so:

"Mayta Capac, Inca!" and other words.

At which the threatening bows were lowered and those dense plumed ranks swayed and were still. Thus motionless stood they until we had come so near we might have touched them, yet no man of them spake a word.

Then, holding the skull aloft for all to see, he spake them again in their own musical language and they hearkening, silent all, till he was done; then came divers of them, that I supposed were chiefs or caciques, to look upon the skull more nearly, yet not daring to touch, and, having seen, cried out in their turn:

"Mayta Capac!"

And oh, the wonder of it! For, with rustling, murmurous sound, like wind in trees, down sank they, rank on rank, one and all upon their faces (as did also our Aztecs) and from friend and foe alike went up a great cry, thrice repeated:

"Mayta Capac, Inca!"

Then these two great companies rose up and mingled one with another, but not to smite or slay, for it seemed that the magic of the golden skull, or the power of Japhet's words, had wrought a miracle of peace and reconciliation.

CHAPTER XXXI

TELLETH HOW I BECAME ROYAL

Two days marched we, a vast company in all good fellowship and amity, though silent; indeed, great wonder was it to me how so many armed men should move with so little sound. And now I went in proud estate, my litter brave with flowers, upon my brow a diadem of flowers all gold and silver, that was a joy to see, and about me a feather mantle very splendid and withal exceeding comfortable to wear. And with every hour as we approached this vast mountain called Hualpa, my awe and wonder grew.

It was upon this second day towards evening we came to sudden halt and, to my surprise, from the fore or vanguard of our army rose sudden fierce clamour of voices, pierced by those shrill, dreadful, wavering cries that no one may hear unmoved and certainly not I. For, scrambling from my litter and no thought of dignity, I must needs go seeking Japhet to know the reason for this hubbub; and moreover we had scarce had chance for a word all day. Now as I went, looking all about me for sight of him, I suddenly espied my lord of Aldbourne, though at first I scarce knew him, for he was clean-shaven once more and decked out like any cacique, save for his shabby breeches, so that I should have laughed but that he stared out of pallid face with eyes that glared such sickness of horror.

"Stay ... stay!" cried he, waving me back in frantic manner. "Bide where you are, Ursula; bide there for God' sake!"

"What then is it, Japhet ... is he hurt ... is he dead?" cried I.

"No, no, 'tis horrible ... stay now, for your own sake—"

But I broke from him and, speeding along a path 'twixt trees and thickets, I checked, recoiled and stood dumb and rigid with horror, for the first thing I saw was a little baby horribly dead and beyond this mangled innocent a woman, young and shapely in her nakedness, and beyond her dead form many others; a place of blood and death and ashes, and in the midst a shrivelled tree, a column of torment whereto hung the contorted shape of what had been an aged man, the chief or cacique (as I guess) of this ravaged village.

And hard by this tortured thing stood Japhet, grasping his naked sword, and I saw its long blade glitter as he gestured with it whiles he spake the fierce-eyed warriors that stood close-ranked about this place of ghastly death.

But even as I gazed, he and these grimly silent warriors swam upon my failing sight, and creeping away, I sank down faint and sickened in mind and body; and haunted by memory of the poor woman and the tiny babe, this mutilated innocent, I called down God's vengeance upon those inhuman monsters that had wrought such abomination. And little did I guess in what manner God would answer this prayer or how I was doomed to see these same terrible men, experience the evil of them, and see the dreadful manner of their expiation.

Truly it is the blessed dispensation of a most merciful Providence that the future is so hid from us that we can know nothing of the sorrows and tribulations, the harms and dangers that shall beset us on life's highway. For though to be forewarned is (mayhap) to be forearmed (in some sort), yet to see and know the dread event afar, to watch it drawing ever nearer would of itself prove such agony of suspense as must but multiply the evil and, sapping our strength, body and will, leave us all weak to front the dread emergency. So rather let it come sudden and all unheralded, and we meet it as best we may, trusting in ourselves and the infinite mercy and power of the God that made us (or so think I).

And indeed, shamed and revolted by the horrors I had glimpsed amid the ruin of that little Indian village, well indeed was it for me I should have no least thought or forebodings of what was to befall and the agonies of mind I was to endure; for looking back on this time, sure am I now that had I known, the mere anticipation would have made me such coward that this narrative would have had a very different ending.

It was in the late afternoon of this same day (and Mount Hualpa now grown so that it filled the whole prospect) that I had my first sight of Viracocha, this city where ruled the Inca Yupanaqui; for of a sudden the forest was behind us and before us a wide plain, and uprising from this green plain, all white and shining, the far-flung embattled walls and towers of a fair city that, enclosed by these high walls and towers, rose in flowery terraces, one above another, on the mighty slope of the mountain,—great flat-roofed houses and domed buildings, topped by a vast structure much like a pyramid that I thought must be a temple. As I stared at all these wonders, rose a loud blaring of horns and out through gates that opened

beneath the centremost tower marched armed men and very splendidly accoutred, and after these one upon a noble horse, a man this who rode alone, though with ranks of other warriors behind him. A tall man this and very shapely who managed his spirited charger very dexterously, the which methought strange, since these Indians do seldom use horses, it seems.

As he came nearer, I guessed this horseman for the Inca himself, for on his head was a crown of feathers but these all of beaten gold; gold shone upon his breast, his arms and thighs so that he seemed dight in golden armour, and about his shoulders a short cloak of feathers; but his face it was that held my gaze, for this seemed golden also, young and aquiline, proud and something fierce, a lean, commanding hawk face that made me think of Japhet's.

And even as I thought this, he reined in his noble horse and lifting one hand aloft cried five or six sweetly sonorous words in loud imperious voice, and then, in gentler tone and to my amazement:

"Japhet, old messmate," called he, "'tis joy to see thee again! Come alongside—!" Then forth of our serried ranks stepped Japhet and with lowly obeisance cried:

"Yupanaqui Inca" ... and divers other words; and then in English:

"Have with thee, Will, old comrade! But first my lady wife, Will." So saying, and to my no small trepidation, he hastened to aid me from my bowery litter.

"Come your ways," says he, "and remember these so beauteous legs do bear a goddess."

"Japhet," says I, taking his hand, "I protest you make me blush!"

"Then will I again," quoth he, tucking my hand within his arm, "for I vow it mightily becomes you."

Being come where the stately Inca awaited us, I made him a courtesy, whereupon he bowed from the saddle and, looking from me to Japhet, smiled, though in the same sad fashion as Huayana.

"Thy wife, Japhet!" saith he and in good English. "Thou that hadst foresworn all women when the Donna Inez killed herself! Well ... 'tis my joy to wish thee joy and to you, lady, all happiness. But since she is thy wife, so is she royal, as I will proclaim." And wheeling his horse, he called to the great silent assemblage, setting his hand lightly upon my head; scarce had he finished speaking than soldiery and townfolk, down sank they, one and all, paying homage to me, though I scarce heeded since I was wondering about this Donna Inez and why she had killed herself...

"And now," quoth the Inca in English, "now to greet these o' the Chachapuya; think you I may trust them, Japhet?"

"Ay, I'll warrant them, Will. We came on a burned village, the work of their damned Spanish allies—ay, and English, as I hear, with a curse!"

And after some while borne in state, the mighty Inca riding upon my right hand, with Japhet walking upon my left, I came into this City of Viracocha and though wonders and marvels were all about me, I looked, yet little heeded, since I must still be thinking of this Donna Inez and wondering why she had killed herself. And this I determined to know, ay, and that he should tell me right speedily.

CHAPTER XXXII

IN WHICH I MAKE AN ASTONISHING DISCOVERY

They brought me into a palatial house on one of the lower terraces and with a train of women to wait upon me, but the poor, pretty creatures so timid and awed at me that I must needs begin to laugh and straightway kissed those that chanced nearest, so that we were soon merry together, they chattering about me like so many birds. They bathed me, they rubbed me with sweet herbs, they rayed me in rich tires, very strange and yet, methought, becoming; they decked me with jewels and golden ornaments of a marvellous craftsmanship and so brought me into a fair garden, whence I might look down upon the city. But look how I might, nowhere could I see aught of Japhet.

This garden was bright with flowers and planted with trees, very artfully, that tempered the sun's fierce rays and with little freshets that purred and tinkled prettily; here too was broad flight of steps leading to the terrace below, and from this other steps leading ever down from garden to garden and so at last into the city itself.

And from this eminence I could see how this city had once been even greater, for beyond one of the flanking walls, and this new builded by its looks, I glimpsed ruined buildings and fire-blackened walls, yet these well-nigh hidden by vines and flowers that made of this desolation a glory of colour.

Now as I stood thus in contemplation, I saw a man climbing these steps towards me, an Indian cacique very richly bedight, though unlike his fellows, being squat yet of powerful build; as he climbed the last stair, he looked up at me and I stood amazed, for this Indian had red hair and the bluest eyes I had ever seen. Being come up to me, he halted and instead of saluting me with stately bow he touched finger to bristly eyebrow.

"Best respects, ma'm!" quoth he with cheery smile.

"Why, you are English!" I cried.

"Hide and hair, ma'm. Jeremy Jervey, at your service."

"But this is wonderful!" said I, reaching him my hands in glad welcome. "And do you know Captain Japhet Bly?"

"Ay," says he, taking my hands and touching them to his brow in the Indian manner, "I do so. And wonderful is the only word for it, if you did but know."

"Then tell me," said I, "pray tell me—but first, have you by chance seen Captain Japhet?"

"Why, 'tis from his honour I be come, ma'm, he bid me tell as the Inca and himself will ha' the honour to sup wi' your ladyship."

"Then prithee, say my ladyship is humbly at his godship's service. And now, Master Jervey, tell me your story."

"Lord love you, my lady, 'twould take me a week."

"Why then, sit here beside me and tell what you may, for I'm all solitary and none to talk with."

"Why then, ma'm, there's some o' your own waiting women can talk English, after a fashion. Shall I call 'em?"

"Why yes,—but first tell me your story and how you come to know Captain Japhet."

"Well, ma'm you see afore you Jeremy Jervey, as sailed out o' Falmouth twenty odd year ago as gunner's mate aboard the *Falcon*, with Captain Amos Trevoe and seventy odd stout lads and all of 'em dead."

"Terrible!" said I. "Were you shipwrecked?"

"Three times, lady. But the *Falcon* was sunk off Porto Bello by a Spanish squadron and all as remained of her crew being prisoners, died in slavery or prison or burned by the Inquisition, and fifteen of 'em buried very handsome up yonder in the Temple."

"And where did you first meet Captain Japhet?"

"Tugging at an oar in a great galleass called the *Tres Marias*. We was chained to the same bench, him and me and my lord Yupanaqui, though we called him Will, and the other poor wretch as slaved with us, for we pulled four to an oar, d'ye see, was a parson out of Hampshire named Penryn, as we called Zeke—"

"Oh, I know him!" cried I.

"Well, m'lady, one night, being ashore and shut in our slave pen, Japhet slips his fetters, forces the guard to free us and away we go, arter killing the guard and—well we got away, nine poor naked wretches as ever was seen, and got us into the woods. But there we lost our bearings and being nigh starvation, we separated. But Japhet and Penryn with the Inca and myself kept together and for weeks we marched, enduring such hardships as few men might, and the end of it was, being weak all and clammed wi' hunger, we were taken by the soldiers of a Don Miguel Maldonado, who sets us a-building of a fort: and in the slave gang along wi' us there was a great fellow name o' Barnabas, and a very fierce and ferocious man, name o' Lovepeace Farrance—"

"I know these also," quoth I breathlessly.

"Well, ma'm, young Japhet, being precious skilful in the treatment o' wounds and such, men or animals, is sometimes let loose therefor, though allus guarded, being accounted very desperate though young. But one day seeing his chance, he downs his guards, frees us and off we sped."

"And got away?" cried I breathlessly.

"Ay, we did, for that same night we boarded a ship, tossed the anchorwatch overboard, battened the crew under hatches and stood out to sea."

"And were never taken?"

"No, ma'm. For with this little ship we took a greater—"

"And was this great ship the *Joyful Deliverance*?"

"No, ma'm, us called her *The Vengeance* and she became the terror of those seas, such bloody vengeance had we—"

"And how came you hither?"

"'Twas by chance o' wind and seas—"

"Ah, a wind of fortune," said I.

"Ay, you may call it so, though 'twas a right furious wind as drove us ashore and wrecked us on these here coasts,—and all on our company drowned save twenty and five—this ship being the *Tiger thirty-two*, for d'ye see, as our powers increased, we took more ships until us had four, namely *The Vengeance*, Cap'n Barnaby, *The Judgement*, Cap'n Zeke Penryn, *The Venture*, Cap'n Stukeley, and *The Tiger*. Cap'n Japhet and I were aboard *The Tiger* and Will or the Inca Yupanaqui likewise. But we ran foul o' two Spanishers, and being sore battered with their shot down on us came storm o' wind as drove us ashore and the old *Tiger* a wreck. Then says Yupanaqui to we poor castaways, 'Messmates,' says he, 'this is my country and yonder, six odd leagues, is Viracocha, the city of my father; march wi' me and ye shall find a fortun' o' gold—or graves. How say ye?' 'Have with thee, comrade!' says Japhet; 'as well die there as here.' And so says we all. So march us did and soon found as Will, that had been master's mate, was a great lord amongst these Indians, for he had but to speak and they fell down and worshipped and followed him, ay, by the hundreds. So came we, like an army, upon this city and found it held by the Spaniards and the people miserable slaves. So, ma'm, though we had no ordnance for battering, we stormed and took this city, though we lost half our company a-doing of it, and having made an end of every Spaniard therein, Will became Yupanaqui the Inca and, with Japhet and the rest on us and labour aplenty, we made good the ruination, most of it; which done, Japhet marches to a bay, that was ever a rendezvous with the Fraternity, called Bartlemy's Bay—"

"I've heard of it," said I.

"But as for me, lady, I bided here along o' Yupanaqui and you see me to-day a cacique, Master of Ordnance, with all the gold and more wives than I want, being twenty and two, ma'm, and others anxious to be signed on. And there's my yarn, ma'm, spun short as I can make it."

"And a very wonderful story!" says I.

"Why, so you said afore, ma'm, and so say I."

"And you expected Captain Japhet's arrival here?"

"Ay, for sure; word came by the smoke. And never no man more heartily glad to see an old shipmate than the Inca and me. And now, my lady, if you're minded to come and take an observation o' my guns, I'll be right proud to show ee." So saying, he reached me his hand, the which I took, and together we began descending towards the city.

"Tell me," said I as we went thus together, "know you aught of the Golden Skull of the Inca?"

"No, ma'm, except as Japhet had it of some cacique down Cuzco way; ye see he was sore hurt and Japhet eased his dying, him having been tortured—"

"Oh, this is vile, cruel country!" cried I.

"Well, mebbe so, now and then, ma'm, here and there—"

"Don't you ever yearn for our dear, sweet England, Jeremy? To be walking its shady lanes, or standing atop of some wind-kissed hill—don't you?"

"Why, no," said he wistfully, "but there's a little back alley in Deptford nigh to Mill Lane, wi' a little tavern o' one corner and at the end a cottage, littlest of all, and a front room so narrer and strait a man can scarce turn,—I won't say as I ha'n't wished myself there mighty often, along o' my old mother.... And here's my guns, ma'm, as we took out of a Spanish carrack. Twelve on 'em and all of 'em named arter my sisters and brothers, for they was twelve too, d'ye see! Here's Tom and John and Bess and Jarge and Caroline and Mary and Ben and Ruth and Dick and Mercy and James and Willum, and all on 'em ready." And now he tells me of converging angles, point-blank ranges, cross fires and the like, in the midst of which:

"Jeremy," says I, "did you ever hear tell of one Donna Inez, that killed herself? Do you know aught of this?"

"Well, ma'm, I do and I don't. And look you my guns so planted shall sweep yon old forest road, which is the only way for horsemen—"

"Do you expect a battle then, Mr. Jeremy?"

"Ay, lady; we've news that Don Hernandez is marching agin us with a great company, Spanish horse and Indian allies, ay, and with battery o' field guns, to make an end of Viracocha and every soul in't. For these Spaniards, d'ye see, wi' their ordnance, muskets and armour, agin the poor Indians' bows and arrows and feathers, make battle a merry, sportful pastime;—'tis like grown man fighting a child. Well, let 'em come, says I, for when my guns open on 'em, they shall find this child is growed to giant to learn 'em as battle aren't such merry business. And now, ma'm—" he stopped suddenly and, glancing whither he looked, I saw rising beyond the dark mystery of the forest, very far away yet plain to sight, smoke that went up in puffs.

"These will be signals, Jeremy."

"Ay, ma'm."

"Do you understand them?"

"Ay, for sure!"

"What is the message?"

"War," he answered, speaking as he read, "Spaniards ... soldiers ... horse and foot ... four batteries ... Indians o' the South ... a great company ... to-morrow ... they come. Ha, well, the more the merrier. Lady, I must to the Council." And away he hastened forthwith.

But as I wandered thus alone and full of anxiety, there met me the Earl in his finery and six grave and stately Indians in his train.

"You go in right princely state, my lord!" said I.

"Ha, damme!" said he peevishly. "In right cursed estate, saving your presence, madam, for these plaguey savages are for ever on my heels ... twelve eyes to watch me ... twelve feet to pursue, twelve hands—"

"But, sir, it seems you have liberty to come and go—"

"Nay, the bilboes aboard ship were better than to be haunted thus. Look at 'em!" quoth he, nodding towards his six attendants, "watching me, silent and dumb as so many accursed ghosts."

"You make great to-do of nothing," said I, and told him of the great army of Spaniards marching to our destruction; hearing this (and to my amazement), he manifested the liveliest satisfaction.

"For," says he, "the very devil 's in 't if I cannot steal away and win to them in the confusion."

"How?" cried I. "Would you trust yourself to these cruel Spaniards?"

"Ay, this would I!" quoth he, "rather than be at mercy of our pirate, and slave for rogue Japhet or his friend this Inca, that talks good enough English but, with heart of a savage, shall torture me to death at merest nod from Japhet, damn him! No, no, these Dons are at the least, gentlemen like myself and I had rather be prisoner to men of birth and breeding—"

"Gentlemen!" cried I bitterly. "These Spaniards! You have seen tokens of their dreadful gentleness—"

"Ay, to Indian savages, Ursula, but I am an English gentleman and, what's more—" he stopped suddenly, as his six Indians as suddenly abased themselves and, glancing up, I saw the Inca Yupanaqui looking at us, and him so splendid, so commanding and truly regal, that instinctively I rose and made him my reverence as did the Earl likewise.

"Madam Ursula, grant me your company," said he in English well-nigh perfect; "let us walk." So saying, he took my hand and together we went up from terrace to terrace until we had reached where stood the Temple, builded of great stones, a strange, awesome structure and methought grim. And here, seated upon carven stone bench, we were so high above the city we could behold its every street and square with the wide plain beyond its walls and, beyond this again, the mighty forests where ran the ancient road straight as an arrow. Glancing from this wide prospect to my strange and silent companion, I saw him so lost in contemplation of this scene, I ventured to observe this kingly Inca more narrowly than I had dared.

Now beholding him thus near, I felt vaguely disquieted to see his features too strangely beautiful for any man and, though intellect showed in his lofty brow and large, well-opened eyes, yet in the curve of sensitive nostril, in the set of shapely mouth and smooth jut of chin, I thought to read an inflexibility of will very like cruelty; thus as I watched him and he thus lost in wistful contemplation of his city, his seemed the sad, cruel, beautiful face of a dreaming, ruthless god. And then soft and pensive he spoke:

"Ye white people do all love power and you are very white and in your eyes a proud and valiant spirit. Well—yonder is power! Yonder is land of promise. Help your Japhet to mould and rule a nation."

"Nay, my lord," said I, all amazed. "I seek no such power—"

"Yet you have it, lady, having Japhet, for he is a power—wise to govern, bold to lead. With him beside me, I might weld these warring tribes into a mighty nation should drive these accursed Spaniards back into the sea—sweep them away. So, lady, you see all my need of him and but for you he would stay!"

"But, my lord," said I, rising, "he hath pledged his word to take me home—"

"Ay, this I know—I know, and he will so do, except you bid him stay."

"Sir, I live but to see my dear England again."

"Ay, lady, but if you die here, here should he abide—"

"Die?" said I, recoiling. "Do you threaten ... would you murder me?"

"One woman's life should weigh light against a nation's welfare," he murmured.

"And how," cried I, "how can your nation's welfare depend on one man and that man Japhet?"

"Nay, ask him, for yonder he cometh." And looking whither he pointed, glad was I to see Japhet striding up the stair towards us.

"Well, messmate," cried he cheerily. "How now, Will man,—'stead o' queenship and godship, this spouse o' mine chooseth her England, eh, lad?"

"Ay, Japhet. She will tell ye I threatened murder. Well, I am the Inca and Lord of Life, as ye do know, and could Death avail, this very night Death should kiss her out o' life. As 'tis, Japhet, my dream—thou and I leading and welding a mighty nation, is done ... the prophecy is yet to be. Go when you will, comrade."

"Nay, my lord," said I, touched by something in his look as he turned from us. "I had no mind to speak of your threat, for God forbid I should come betwixt friendship such as yours—so, pray, come you and sup with us."

"Nay, 'tis done!" he murmured, looking down at me with his slow, sad smile. "And as for supper ... forgive, excuse me!" And with graceful salutation, he turned and vanished into the great temple.

"Yonder went disappointment!" said Japhet, looking after him with troubled eyes.

"A wretch!" said I. "And frighteth me, Japhet, for despite his noble seeming and English speech, he is all savage Indian at heart and, for to keep you here to his purpose, would kill poor me, I believe."

"Assuredly!" nodded Japhet.

"You think so, too?" I gasped.

"I know it, ma'm, beyond all doubt. This is why I took solemn oath before him and his priests in the Temple yonder to march hence in a week at most, whether you lived or died." Now at this, I could but sink weakly down upon the seat again:

"Oh, for my dear England!" sighed I.

"England!" he snorted. "You and your England! And what then? To travel 'twixt country and town, ruffle it at Court, the Mall, the clubs and coffeehouses; to jog to the markets, yawn on the bench, snore in church,—you an ineffectual fine lady and I a round-paunched do-nothing squire, both battening in a slumberous ease,—ha, the devil!"

At this I laughed, but presently growing angry:

"Sir," quoth I, "you may have your wicked pirates, your savage Incas and hateful wilderness, but my choice is the sweet calm of joys of England and the comforts and decencies of civilization; give me but these again and you may return to your hateful godship."

"Ay," quoth he, scowling, "yourself being safe home again, poor Japhet may go hang—"

"No," said I, "rather to be god and king of this wild people! For better this, thinks you, than a do-nothing, round-paunched squire; so you shall be free as air—"

"Free?" saith he, groaning, "Aleck, ma'm, you forget how a moment's folly hath clamped on me the shackles matrimonial; thy woeful spouse am I—"

"And yet had rather be a savage god!" I retorted, the which angered him as I had hoped it might for:

"Fool, I have not said so!" quoth he, whereupon:

"Nay, Japhet," said I, all suddenly mild and plaintive, "do not rage against me, for truly your Inca doth so affright me that in my heart I am thanking God for thee and do marvel how He hath given thee such power with this fierce people. But whence is your power; why doth this proud Inca, himself so strong, seek aid of you; what doth it all mean?" For a moment he sat, chin in fist, staring thoughtfully on the distance.

"In this great Temple of the Sun behind us," said he suddenly, "be divers gravings and hieroglyphs very ancient that do

foretell the coming of one, a stranger, who shall make this people a great and mighty race, and this stranger a white man from overseas yet marked with the sacred symbol of the sun."

"Well?" I demanded, for he had fallen silent again.

"Well, ma'm, it befell upon a day I was chained naked to an oar aboard a Spanish galley beside Yupanaqui, who presently hailed me for this same long-expected deliverer because of certain mark he spied upon me."

"You mean that upon your breast."

"No, ma'm, that royal symbol was not on me then nor till I came hither for the first time. No, this was yet another mark and not upon my chest. Shall I show ye, ma'm?" But, seeing how the wretch leered on me, I knew not how to answer, so said nothing; whereupon:

"Ha, Madam Prudery!" he mocked. "Now see it you shall, for the time is come for less o' mystery betwixt us. Looke then, nor close thy so modest eyes!" So saying, he whipped off his long Indian buskin, unbuttoned the leg of his breeches and, rolling it up, showed me the mark of an old hurt shaped like a great star.

Now as I looked on this, the years rolled backward and I saw a slim boy who lay half-swooning whiles I, a child and nigh swooning too, held my kerchief to the dreadful hurt I dared not look on, and screamed for aid.

"'Twas when your pony threw you!" said I, in awed whisper.

"Ay," he nodded, "upon the tree stump beside the brook. Howbeit, here's the mark that Yupanaqui and his priests do take for symbol of their long-awaited deliverer."

"Oh, but you ..." I gasped, "then you are ... you must be—"

"Ay," he nodded, pulling on his buskin, "you have it at last, ma'm; I am Charles Vivian Japhet, Earl of Aldbourne, as you should ha' guessed long ere now."

"But the ... the Earl?..." I stammered, all bemused.

"Meaning our Johnny? Well, ma'm, he is the elder o' my two rogue cousins that, with their father, my villainous uncle, shipped me off whiles yet a lad and sold me into slavery. And now," said he, rising, "let us to supper."

I went beside him quite dumb-struck, for I knew this indeed for very truth, yet could scarce believe: then grew angered at myself that I should never have guessed this; until bethinking me if the gentle, delicate boy as I remembered him years ago, and seeing him to-day so strong a man and withal so grimly fierce, small wonder was it I should not have known; as I told him and roundly: "For," says I, "the sweet and tender boy I knew is become such fierce great wretch, how should I know you?"

"Ay, faith," he nodded; "a slave ship and such like is a something hard school that kills or cures ... cruelty begets ferocity. Some day, ma'm, if you can wheedle and woo me from my native shrinking modesty, you shall see upon my naked back the sign manual of a slave—"

"Oh, silly man," said I, 'twixt laughing and weeping, "I have seen it more than once and wept for those cruel scars."

"And yet, ma'm, saw naught o' this scar that should ha' told you who I was."

"Sir," I retorted, "pray believe I saw no more of you than I could help."

"Aha, Madam Finical Squeamishness," quoth he, with odious laugh, "sink me, but I can well believe it!"

After this we went in silence until we had reached that terrace where stood my sumptuous lodge, before which stood divers of my waiting women to usher us within. Now at sight of them I stopped and:

"Japhet," said I, "who, pray, was the Donna Inez?"

For a long moment he was silent, keeping his face turned from me.

"She was a very sweet and noble lady of Spain," said he at last.

"Was she ... young?" I enquired softly.

"Just twenty turned."

"And ... beautiful?"

"Ay, truly," he answered, and his head still averted, "beyond description."

"And you ... loved her ... Japhet?"

"Ay, I did," he murmured in voice more tender than I had ever heard from his lips.

"Then why ... wherefore did she kill herself?"

"Madam," said he, turning on me a face suddenly grim, "by your kindness, we will speak no more of this sweet lady."

"So, then ... you love her ... even yet?"

"Ay, I do!" he murmured. "I do indeed."

"And you will not confide in me the manner of her—"

"No!" cried he, turning on me so passionately that I recoiled; then he was gone, striding like a madman and I all confounded, for in his eyes murder had glared and his furrowed brow all sudden wet like one in agony.... And so this night, at table set as for a banquet with dishes of gold and surrounded by my handmaids, I supped alone and a very sorry meal I made of it.



CHAPTER XXXIII

IN WHICH, AMONG OTHER MATTERS, JAPHET TELLETH ME TALE OF ROGUERY

The roar of Jeremy's great cannon awakened me to find my waiting women all about my bed, crouched upon their knees and I in great consternation as they; yet seeing how they one and all turned their great, fearful eyes on me (the poor things!) as if in myself was their salvation, I smiled on them, making light of my fears, and kissed them all a blithe good morning, so that they were soon smiling too and chattering about me in their pretty speech like so many pies. Soon as they had bathed and dressed me, forth I went (and they clustering in my train) out into a young morning, only to be deafened by another thunderous discharge of cannon that echoed and re-echoed against the great mountain above us, crash on crash, until it had rolled and rumbled away. And now I heard sounds even more dreadful, the screams and outcries of anguished men and stricken horses, drowned in crackling musketry fire with frenzied shouts and noise of battle.

And coming where I might look down on all this, I saw the forest road all strewn and cumbered with prone men and horses. And now I could not but marvel at the fierce bravery of these Spaniards for, despite the smoke and flame of Jeremy's guns, though many of these assailants were smitten, others came on, in especial one—a cavalier completely armed and a scarlet plume in his helmet who, spurring his brave horse, leapt the rampire, cutting down Jeremy's gunners until his horse reared and fell and I saw him no more. But already I had seen too much, so back fled I to the comparative quiet of my chamber. Yet being here I could nowise endure the suspense but must needs go wandering forth again, and my devoted maids with me. Climbing to that highest terrace where stood the Temple, and where no chance shot or flying arrow might reach us, I paused to look down upon the dreadful scene below. I saw the wide forest road and the plain itself bestrewn with the dead or maimed bodies of men and horses (as hath been said) while from the forest on either side of this road of death came puffs of musketry fire, with ever and anon the belching smoke and flare of the enemy's cannon.

Then, to where Jeremy's twelve guns thundered in answer, a horseman came galloping and though he was dight in helmet and corselet I knew by his gestures this armed cavalier was Japhet. At his bidding (or so it seemed), Jeremy's guns ceased their fire; whereupon the enemy, growing bolder, began issuing forth of the woods, musketeers and pikemen very many and with them hosts of painted Indians; on they came, shouting and screaming their battle cries, pausing now and then to fire their pieces of loose flights of arrows. From these I looked to our defenders and saw the Inca clad in armour marshalling a great company at one gate, while Japhet did the like at another; suddenly a trumpet sounded, the gates swung wide, and forth they leapt to smite and be smitten, Japhet and his company charging the left flank of the enemy, the Inca their right, Japhet fighting afoot, the Inca upon his tall horse.

And now, though I scarce dared look, yet watch I must, striving ever to follow the gleam and flash of Japhet's armour where he fought in that reeling, close-locked battle, that desperate fray where deadly steel flickered so busily amid jets of smoke and flame.... And now he was gone, and I nigh frantic, and now I saw him again, only to lose sight of him once more. Beset thus fiercely right and left, the enemy began to give back and yet back, slowly at first and keeping their array, but gradually this orderly retreat became confused, their ranks were broken, rent asunder, and they were driven back into the woods a wild, unordered rabble. And now from these leafy glooms came a ghastly hubbub of merciless slaughter, horrid sounds suddenly hushed or fading into distance....

And after some while forth of the woods came the victors, dragging or goading their wretched captives before them in triumph, but never a glimpse of Japhet; sometimes amid those returning bands I would catch the glitter of helmet or breastplate and go speeding down citywards only to find this to be some captured Spaniard.

Thus, as the weary hours dragged by, my anxious fears increased on me so much that when my waiting women came, begging me to eat, the sight of food so revolted me that I drove them away, all save one, a pretty, gentle creature named Lualla that spoke English better than her companions. With her beside me I roamed, miserably watching, praying, and my eyes always in the one direction.

"He is dead, Lualla, oh, he is surely dead, or lying out yonder in that hateful forest ... hurt ... wounded. Oh, Lualla, do you think he is dead?"

"Not dead—no!" she answered in her soft, rich voice. "Inca not back ... he with Inca; not dead—no!" And in these words

I found me such comfort I must needs kiss the gentle speaker very fervently.

"Howbeit," said I, "if he come not soon, I shall go seek him, Lualla."

"Then I go—me also!" she nodded, whereat I kissed her again.

It was long past noon when I espied a party of our Indians issue forth of the woods and chief of these Jeremy, so down I went, hoping and praying for sight or news of Japhet. I met Jeremy at the gate and seizing his mailed arm (for he too was sheathed in steel), "Oh, Jeremy," cried I; "have you news of Captain Japhet?"

"Ay, ma'm, he's away in chase and hard astern of rogues as he hath sworn to be the death on—"

"Is he well ... unharmed?"

"Yes, ma'm."

"And who," I demanded, as we went together, "who are these men he is pursuing so vengefully?"

"Rogues as should die slow, ma'm, slow, being a renegade English Captain, named Roger Snaith, and his fellow rogue, Cap'n Toby Ingleby—but, ma'm, yonder is the prisoners; I shouldn't come no further if I was you." And indeed I now became aware of a very dismal crying and groaning; nevertheless I would not be turned back and coming into the square, beheld these poor wretches, a woeful, blood-spattered company, some of whom lay on the dusty earth faint with their wounds and pleading for water. Now seeing no one heeded their piteous supplications, I beckoned Lualla and, with her to aid me, brought water and began ministering to these poor sufferers, though watched very much askance by Jeremy and divers of the caciques; and one of those last daring to oppose me, I (bethinking me of my goddess-ship) cried out on him, waving him from me so imperially that he instantly abased himself and shrank away, nor did any dare oppose us thereafter; nay, at my command through Lualla, they sent Indians to bring us water as we required, for these prisoners were many and all of them perishing with thirst. Thus we, Lualla and I, laboured to their comfort and in this business I found ease and respite for my own troublous anxiety. Now, coming to a wounded prisoner who sat leaning him 'gainst the wall, very mute and patient, I knew him for that same young cavalier who had led the attack against Jeremy's guns—a slim, handsome man very young and who, ere I might stoop to set the cup to his lips, must needs rise (and despite the pain of his hurts), bowing to me like the gentleman he was, ere he would suffer himself to drink.

"Señora," said he in halting English, "this poor gentleman from his heart he thanks." Having drunk, he sighed and returned the cup with another bow and smile that beautified his young, haggard features.

"Pray sir, who are you?" I enquired.

"Hilario de Rosca-Huerta y Villapeña, and he shall no never forget your so merciful goodness."

And when we had ministered to the prisoners, each and every, and done what we might to staunch their wounds and ease their suffering, Lualla and I went from that place of anguish.

Scarce had we reached the first terrace than was great braying of horns and from the forest rode Yupanaqui and a great company, yet with never a prisoner, the which set me a-wondering; but having assured myself that Japhet was not with him, and I being weary and faint with hunger, I got me to my lodge and, having eaten and bathed, lay down and fell to an uneasy doze.

But after a while cometh Lualla (the dear thing!) her eyes adance for joy like her pretty feet, crying:

"He come ... he come!" Up rose I and out to see this for very truth, for there indeed marched Japhet, flashing in his armour amid an orderly array, and down went I to meet him. But in the gate stood the Inca and such throng that I, checking, determined not to meet him with so many eyes to watch us.

"Well so, Japhet," cried Yupanaqui, "how now, messmate, didst achieve ... didst up with him?"

"Ay, I did, Will; ay, faith I did," answered Japhet, his face all grim and hateful to see beneath his lifted vizor. "Toby Ingleby shall murder and ravish no more and here's proof—lookee," and he gestured to a tall Indian behind him, who raised aloft a dripping spear and on its point such hairy, pallid, blood-bedabbled thing that sickened me to see.

"Here's Toby Ingleby—Number One!" cried Japhet. "There remain Roger Snaith and James Rogerson—"

"Lualla!" I gasped. "Oh, Lualla, help me—take me away or I shall swoon—" But even as she ran to clasp me, a less gentle arm was about me, a steel-clad arm and I looked up into Japhet's scowling visage.

"Loose me," I pleaded, but his arm became cruel.

"What, Madam Queasy," quoth he; "the devil's in't that you must for ever be where you should not." So saying, and will I, nill I, he brought me up to my lodge where at the mere sight of him my handmaids came running to abase themselves before his lordly godship; but at his gesture they rose and crept away every one, leaving us together.

"Well, my Lady Megrim," says he, scowling, "what now? Say it and be done." But instead of fiercely upbraiding and reproaching him (since he expected it), I shuddered from him, sank down upon my couch and looked up at him, timidly askance like the poor, shocked creature I was.

"Oh," sighed I miserably, "it is now evident you are far more a bloodthirsty Inca than English gentleman! You are indeed far better suited to their cruel, savage ways than to the gentle quiet of my dear England." But at this, instead of retorting on me furiously and railing against England as I had expected, he falls to clinking and clanking to and fro in his armour and never a word; therefore, sighing deeper, I tried him again:

"And so, when you bring me safe to England, my lord—" but he stops me with stamp and clang of his hateful armour.

"None o' that, thankee, ma'm," says he gruffly. "I'm Bly, Captain Japhet Bly o' the *Deliverance*."

"Never!" I retorted, stamping my foot at him and wishing I might be gruff also. "I know you beyond all doubt for my lord the Earl of Aldbourne and as such I shall name you—"

"Howbeit, ma'm, you will never be my lady countess!" he snarled. Now at this I could have scratched the wretch very joyfully, and being too angry for proper rejoinder, was silent, whereupon says he, planting himself before me with jangling clash:

"For lookee, since I'm determined to remain Captain Bly, you, ma'm, will remain Ma'm Bly, ma'm, and there's for ye!"

"And so, my lord," I continued, meekly gentle, "when your lordship hath fulfilled his promise (and I beg your lordship not to snort at me)—fulfilled his promise and carried me safe to my loved England, I will humbly ask you, my lord, to procure for me a bill of divorcement, and leave your noble lordship to fly back to your lordship's fierce Aztecs and turn Indian."

"Vastly fine!" says he, sneering; then finding no more words for it, begins to clink and clank again until:

"Oh, for pity's sake," cried I, "be still! Sit down or take off that detestable armour."

"Why, 'tis a very noble armour!" quoth he. "Steel o' proof, Ma'm Bly, and inlaid wi' gold, lookee! An hundred years old mayhap, yet it hath served me well this day."

"To kill men and ... cut off their heads!" I whispered, shuddering.

"Yes, faith!" said he, clapping hand to sword hilt. "The head of Cap'n Tobias Ingleby—one o' three, ma'm that shall have like end, though I die for't."

"Oh, barbarous!" cried I, and covering my face; but suddenly he had caught and plucked away my hands and pulled me to my feet, so that I must needs face him and very nearly.

"Barbarous, says you!" quoth he fiercely. "You that have experienced nothing of barbarity all your smugly sheltered, easeful days! Ursula,—fool madam, I tell you there are sweet, pure souls, in especial one, ha' suffered such barbarity its contrivers should die a thousand deaths 'stead o' one ... I might tell you such fearsome tale that"—he choked on the word and I saw his furrowed brow all beaded with great drops ere, loosing my hands, he turned away, as to hide his face from me.

"What tale, Japhet?"

"A tale of such shameful evil I ... cannot tell of it, yet hear it you shall, and when you've heard ... call me barbarous if you can." So saying, he caught my hand, led me out upon the terrace and, setting fingers to mouth, whistled thrice very loud and shrill. And presently in answer, up towards us came Jeremy Jervey, who had done off his armour.

"Jerry," said the Captain, so soon as he was near us, "tell madam here why I chased and killed Ingleby to-day."

So saying and without glancing towards me, away he goes to the terrace below, there to stride to and fro like man driven by some frenzy.

"Well, what must you tell me, Jeremy?" said I, my gaze on that distracted figure below me.

"Why, 'tis mighty black and foul yarn, ma'm, but if I must, well, stand by! Years ago, lady, this here Cap'n Ingleby was one o' three as wrought black shame on a sweet lady, poor soul, and she a noble lady o' Spain—"

"Oh!" said I, catching my breath. "Was she this Donna Inez?"

"That same, ma'm," he answered and paused, eyeing me askance.

"'Twas she who killed herself and wherefore, Jeremy?"

"Ma'm—" said he and paused again.

"Well?" I questioned. "Tell me, Jeremy, tell me."

"Lady she was ... took ... by this Ingleby and two others, stripped, ma'm, and ... brutalized ... killed herself for shame, she did, though Japhet would have married her even so, for he loved her, d'ye see. But she crept away and drowned her poor sweet self. And so 'tis Japhet took solemn oath to kill 'em all three and come nigh a-doing of it more than once ... and to-day he's made an end o' Toby Ingleby, glory be! So there's the truth on't, ma'm, a yarn as aren't nowise fit for a pretty lady's ears—"

What more he said I know not, for his bald words had conjured to my mind such visions of hateful evil as dreaded me to think on, and my heart so full of pity for this poor lady that, sinking upon the carven bench, I bowed my head, praying for her present happiness, little dreaming how narrowly I myself was to escape her terrible fate.

And in a little I was aware of Japhet beside me and him speaking in tone ineffably kind and gentle.

"What then, canst weep for her, Ursula!" Then came his hand to touch my head and gentle as his voice.

"Nay, now, dry your sweet tears," said he, "for she's a glorious saint in heaven these many years."

"Indeed," I sobbed, "it is no wonder you honour and so love her—even yet, Japhet." At this, he raised me and finding a tear upon my nose, kissed it away. Then bringing me to my lodge:

"Ursula," says he, "'twas very salt tear yon, and, as I think, the most unselfish those eyes ever shed. Now sleep awhile, for to-night we are to see the secret wonders of Huaca,—behold all the marvels of the Temple of the Sun, for to-night, Ursula, we restore to Capac Yupanaqui the Fourth Inca, his long-lost skull, thou and I and Will, that is Manco Yupanaqui, the Fifteenth Inca. And, what's more, to-morrow or so soon as you will, we set out for Bartlemy's Bay and the *Deliverance*."

"Oh, Japhet!" cried I in ecstasy. "The *Deliverance*,—my *Joyful Deliverance* and—England?"

"Ay," he nodded, frowning, "'tis so I promised. But now get what sleep you may. Lord knoweth when we shall to bed this night." With this he left me and I so full of joy at the mere prospect that I knew sleep out of the question; therefore, after tossing restlessly awhile, up I got and out into the sunshine. Espying Jeremy with divers of his Indians busied with his beloved guns, I went down to him, and, plucking him by the arm, bade him walk with me and he showing something unwilling, I told him how we must soon be bidding each other good-bye.

"Lord!" quoth he, shaking his head gloomily. "So soon! Is it you and Cap'n Japhet, or do you take t'other un along?"

"T'other un?" I repeated. "If you speak of the Earl of—no, I mean Mr. Barrasdale—I cannot say. Where is he, Jeremy?"

"Chained up along o' t'other prisoners for sure, lady."

"Oh, but wherefore?"

"Roving where he shouldn't ought, ma'm; Cap'n's orders! The which do mind me as Japhet bid me keep a weather eye on you, likewise, 'for,' says he, 'Jerry,' says he, 'my lady's forever a-standing off and on, backing and filling, plying here and there when least expected, so Jerry,' says he, 'should you run athwart her hawse,' he says, 'take her in tow lest she run foul of aught'—them's his orders consarning your ladyship and—"

"I can well believe it, Jeremy, for they sound extreme odious. But I'll be at no man's orders, pray heaven, and shall come and go as I list. So walk with me, Jeremy, or I go alone."

We had been following the stream that floweth through the city and were come where it ran winding away, all bowered in trees and climbing vines, very cool and pleasant to see.

"Come," said I, "let us sit down in this pleasant shade and hearken to this pretty stream. It whispers and gurgles like a little river I know in my dear Sussex, called the Adur. Know you Sussex, Jeremy?"

"No, ma'm. And as for setting down, ma'm, there's my guns, d'ye see, and Cap'n Japhet's orders—"

"Sussex is the loveliest place in all the world, Jeremy,—or so think I."

"Yes, ma'm. But—"

"So, hearkening to this stream, I have only to close my eyes, Jeremy, and think myself back in our dear England."

"Ay, ma'm! Hows'ever if—"

"Indeed this is very pretty river; how do you call it?"

"The Popayan, lady, and 'tis much greater than you'd guess, for it runneth through the forest wi' many Indian villages on its banks and growing ever bigger till it meeteth another larger river that runneth hundreds o' leagues till it reacheth the mighty River of Amazons."

"Ay, this is the greatest of all rivers, I've heard, Jeremy."

"Why 'tis so, lady, so great you may not see across the width of it, and courseth through a wondrous country."

"And these Amazons—hast ever seen them?"

"Ay, I have, ma'm."

"Well, are they very fierce and terrible?"

"Ay and no, ma'm. Fine, buxom, upstanding lasses I thought 'em, and fair like you, wi' very long hair bound about their heads in tresses and no clothes to speak on, except here and theer, and wi' bows and arrers, d' ye see. But lord, ma'm, I must to they guns o' mine. So if you will set there, ma'm, why set, though the Cap'n's orders—"

"Very well, Jeremy, if you meet him, tell him where to find me." So there sat I, hearkening to the soft, pretty murmur of these waters and heartily wishing myself back in England beside another stream, wondering if I should ever see it again and what the outcome of my wanderings must be. And bending to peep at my reflection where the waters ran smooth and still, I must needs think how marvellous changed was my life, and I myself, from that vain and wilful Ursula Revell had viewed herself feature by feature in the mirror of her bedchamber so many ages ago (as it truly seemed). And this set me thinking on all that had befallen me, the terrors, the dangers and, to be sure, of Japhet and the wild manner of our marriage and how we had never said one word of love to each other, no, not one. This led me to such thoughts as: Could I ever truly love him? Then: Had I already begun to love him? And then again: Had I not been loving him—ever since we had started out upon this wild journey?

"No!" cried I so sudden and loud that I startled myself and a blue-green parrot screeched at me and flew away. But "no" (thinks I), "for mine is such a positive nature I should have no doubts were this indeed so."

These thoughts so wrought on me that I arose (my long hair all about me) and began to walk beside this stream and as I went argued and debated the matter with myself on this wise:

I: True love (for such as yourself knoweth no doubts, therefore being so full of doubts you love him not).

MYSELF: Then wherefore must I be for ever thinking of him?

I: Because, as he said, he is your salvation in this wild country.

MYSELF: Yet being truly the Earl of Aldbourne, he is a great gentleman.

I: Yet seemeth and showeth himself to you no more than gruff, rude sailorman.

MYSELF: Howbeit, being himself, he is the man his and my own long-dead parents had chosen to spouse me.

I: And he to-day no better than rogue pirate.

MYSELF: Yet one hath used me with respect—

I: Did he not whip thee? Oh, shame!

MYSELF: Well, he hath never forced me, no—not even a kiss.

I: Fool, how know you he will not yet—bethink you of the weary miles yet to go, the dark forests, the long nights and you so solitary and helpless.

MYSELF: I am no whit fearful and nothing afraid.

I: Be ashamed to say so or else know yourself in love and yearning to be his wife.

MYSELF: Odious thought!

Lost thus in meditation, I found I had turned away from the pleasant river and was ascending a narrow path that wound upwards amid thick vegetation towards mighty Hualpa that soared high above me, its lofty, snow-capped pinnacle aflame with sunset, for evening was at hand, or rather that brief period that in these latitudes interveneth between the glaring heat of day and the cool fragrance of night. Having climbed this path a good distance I paused to fetch my breath and to gaze upward at the ever-changing glory of Mount Hualpa's mighty summit changing down from gold to pink, to glowing red and this again to deepening purple, when I heard a rustling among the thick undergrowth that shut in the narrow track, and glanced towards this approaching and, as it seemed, stealthy sound in no small trepidation, dreading lest it be some prowling wild beast or another of those great and horrid snakes. Judge them my vasty relief when I heard a breathless voice groan forth in Spanish:

"*O Santa Maria!*" and other dolorous words, answered by another and stronger voice:

"*Courage, compañero mio.*"

Thinking I recognized this second voice, I pushed in among the dense boskage and thus presently beheld this same very young Spanish cavalier Don Hilario, half leading, half carrying one who seemed scarce able to go. At sight of me, he eased his feeble companion to the ground and sinking upon one knee reached forth his hands in gesture of supplication.

"Señorita," he murmured, "my friend and myself, by your will now we live perchance or die ... you show mercy to prisoners so many—show now mercy on two,—this my comrade Señor Don Diego Espinosa and myself."

"Sir," I answered, clasping these appealing hands, "this will I. Down yonder is a river with boats—piraguas. Come and I will show you," and I turned to bring them to the path but, seeing this Don Diego so faint with his hurts (and moreover grey-headed), I set my arm about him also, whereupon he groaned forth alternate excuses and gratitude and thus very slowly and painfully we made our way towards the river; and now, strange to say, instead of them it was I that began to fret and agonize lest they be espied or pursued and captured ere they could reach the canoes; so that when at last the river showed before us I could well-nigh have screamed, so wrought up was I. Reaching the piraguas or canoes, I saw poor Don Diego's wounds bleeding afresh, so that I must stay to reset and tighten the rough bandages the best I might, and he all the time gasping forth words I could only guess at, since I had no Spanish; and when we had got him aboard, this young Hilario must waste precious time to kiss my hands, the hem of my cloak until, in my very impatience for their safety, I pushed him into the canoe, and heaved a sigh of relief to see them glide away on the swift current and both of these poor gentlemen looking back on me with such eyes as I shall never forget.

Thus stood I, waving my hand in farewell, until a bend in the river had hidden them from sight. Then I turned about and started so violently that I came near tumbling into the river, for within a yard of me stood Japhet, his lips uncurled in their mocking, quirkish smile.

"Well, ma'm, so you must be at it again!" saith he. "Stealing away more prisoners."

"Ay, I did!" I retorted. "And you must be spying on me, as usual. Well, since you saw, why did you suffer it?"

"Lord, ma'm!" he exclaimed with helpless gesture, "as well bid me stay yon river or the stars in their courses, for though I am for these Indians a king and god, for thyself I am merest man."

Now at this I smiled on him and slipping my hand within his arm walked him along beside this pretty stream and both of us silent awhile; and then said I:

"Indeed, sir, you are such very man that sometimes, despite your show of brutish ferocity, I do begin to think you have a heart ... very generous ... and tender except in the case of your enemy the poor Earl of—Mr. Barrasdale."

"Nay, give him his title, ma'm; our Johnny's heartily welcome to the heritage he sinned for,—though I doubt his lordly carcass shall fetch more i' the slave market than did poor Japhet's years ago."

"Have you—oh, Japhet, have you no thought of forgiveness?"

"Not a whit, ma'm, not a whit."

"Will nothing change your cruel purpose?"

"No!" he answered fiercely. "Nothing in this world."

"Then would you not forego your vengeance—for my sake?"

"Would you forego your England for mine?" he demanded. At this I was silent awhile; then:

"Supposing I did?"

"I cannot suppose aught so impossible, ma'm."

"Then suppose," said I, keeping my face averted, "that to turn you from such cruelty to your enemy, and he your cousin, to win you to mercy and forgiveness, I ... give myself ... come to you as your wife?"

"What, lass,—what? Barter me your body for this? Fie now, such proffer shameth you and would shame me. Would ye so tempt your poor, modest sailorman—fie on you again, ma'm. Let us go back ere the night catch us! Lord love me, I'm a-flushing and a-blushing as 'tis." Now, shamed and furious at his hateful mockery, I snatched my hand from his arm and struck at him (being quite beyond myself with mortification), but he caught my fist and drawing it within his arm again, held it there, strive and struggle how I would. And thus, perforce, I went on beside him again back towards the town. And when we had gone some little way:

"My dear," said he, in tone all sudden gentle, "though we are truly wed, yet shall you never be truly my wife until—" and here the wretch must pause and wait for me to question him, the which, and despite all my proper dignity and pride, at last I did; for:

"Well, sir, until—what pray?" I demanded, coldly as might be.

"Until," said he, pressing my arm close, "of your own accord you come creeping into my arms and with your lips on mine, say—'Japhet, I have come home to thy heart because I am all your own and love you body and soul.'" Now these words conjured up such picture that though by now the quick night was beginning to fall and he not even looking at me, I felt my cheeks all hot and my body all ashiver; nevertheless I answered and readily enough:

"Can you even think I ever shall?"

"Ay, I do!" he answered. "I do indeed."

"Oh!" said I. And then: "Why can you think such thing of me?"

"Wherefore do you so tremble and fear to look on me?" he questioned; and I so self-conscious and fool-like that I knew not how to answer and so was dumb as any oyster.

Thus we went on in silence till, reaching my terrace, I brought him where was carven bench, remote and well secluded and sitting down, beckoned him beside me.

"Faith now, my buxom beauty," says he, leering on me as any rude mariner might have done, "'tis fair loverlike place this; hast brought me here to kiss and fondle me?"

"Sir!" cried I indignantly; whereat he did but laugh at me, whiles I watched him with eyes serene and unwavering until his merriment subsiding:

"Japhet," said I, making my voice sweetly kind yet withal reproachful, "why, 'stead of wasting the years to such ill purpose, oh, why did you never come back to England and claim your heritage boldly and right yourself by law?"

"Because for one thing, Ursula, possession is nine points of the law; and for another thing, because by law my rogue uncle inherited, since I was reported dead—"

"Indeed, I heard of this," cried I, "while I was away at school in London. But how—"

"And being dead, ma'm, I was duly buried, ay, and I'll warrant me, with as much pomp as any of my lordly ancestors. So there was an end of Charles Vivian Japhet Barrasdale, Earl of Aldbourne."

"Nay, but how could such monstrous thing be?"

"Very easily, Ursula. The body they buried with such ceremonious pomp was the battered corpse of a poor unknown youth that my rogue uncle and Roger Brent, his head gamekeeper, found in an old hammerpond called Tutley Blackwater—"

"I've seen it, Japhet."

"This unknown youth had been a poor, slim creature, much as I was then, in my twentieth year, and it was this similarity (as I guess) inspired my uncle and his two sons, John and Geoffrey, to their purpose. Howbeit, they paid Roger Brent well, swore him to secrecy and had me waylaid and carried off to sea. Thus, whiles they were burying the young Earl of Aldbourne with so much honour, poor Japhet, direly seasick, was being kicked and cuffed aboardship. To Hispaniola we sailed and there was I sold a slave, for an hundred and three pieces of eight, and the marvel is that I fetched so much."

"Oh, Japhet!" said I, my heart wrung for him. "Oh, Japhet! But when you broke free and were a man ... captain of a ship ... why not sail home and force these wicked wretches—?"

"Nay, Ursula; think, child—think! So many weary years! And I so vastly changed that none might know me, much less swear to me. And little money to fight my cause at law.... And yet indeed come back I did at last—ay, ma'm, and in time to save you from wedding my roguish Cousin Geoffrey—"

"I should never have married him, Japhet!"

"Howbeit, ma'm, I'd word 'twas all arranged."

"But why did you return at last?"

"For that, by most strange chance, Ursula, I had found me such witness as might ha' proved and won my suit."

"Ay, but who—who was it?" I questioned breathlessly. "Tell me how and who—and why you are still only—poor Japhet?"

"Well, ma'm, we o' the Brotherhood of the 'Broken Shackle' on a day fought and took a great galleass off the Main, and, among the poor slaves in this floating hell, whom should I find but this same Roger Brent that was head gamekeeper to my uncle—and him sick and nigh dead with hardship and suffering. Well, I recognized him none the less, made myself known and he told me all. And, moreover, how Cousin John being the Earl, my uncle being dead, this Roger was such fool as to remind him of poor young Japhet and the end of it was, he, too, was sent overseas lest his tongue wag too

freely. Well, Ursula, so soon as we might, I sailed for England, but poor Roger was a sick man and within sight of Shoreham Harbour he died."

"Oh, cruel!" cried I and could have wept.

"Nevertheless I landed, enquired for and found his sister Mercy, learned how Geoffrey was to marry you, and John sailing in his ship the *Lion*—and so all's told."

CHAPTER XXXIV

TELLETH HOW WE JOURNEYED INTO THE HEART OF THE MOUNTAIN AND THE DIVERS WONDERS THEREOF

So marvellous bright was the moon that as we mounted the wide stairway towards the Temple, I could see all things plain as day, in especial Japhet and how for the first time he was arrayed splendidly as the Inca himself; and very comely I thought him. Thus close beside him I entered this vast building, first a hall very wide and lofty, lit by torches and great candles, its walls wonderfully wrought and carved and in the midst a colossal image at sight of which I caught my breath; for this was the statue of no Indian, and by some strange chance these graven features, lean, forceful and something irregular, might almost have been Japhet's very own.

"The mark—above the knee!" said he in my ear. "Strange, oh, ma'm Ursula; strange and devilish odd."

Crossing this vast hall, we came to and began to descend a stairway that seemed to bring us nowhere, for it ended at a wall formed of one vast stone whereon was graven that emblem of the sun in splendour with a little altar below, where stood three priests. At sight of us they prostrated themselves and, in the same moment, the great stone turned as on an axis and we passed into such place of radiant splendour that for a moment I was dazzled and bemused.

This also was a great hall but its walls and domed roof plated all with wrought and shining gold. And here, standing beneath another huge, radiate sun, but this itself of gold, and with long triple ranks of motionless priests to right and left of him, stood Yupanaqui the Inca. At our coming he raised his hands, whereat the many priests bowing themselves before us in greeting, cried together words that sounded like:

"Pachacamac ... Haran Pacha!"

Then spake the Inca; after which Japhet made reply and, throwing back the cloak he wore, held aloft that strange golden skull that all eyes might behold it; at sight of which Yupanaqui sank to his knees and the priests abased themselves. Then, fixing me with his cruel eyes, the Inca addressed me:

"Madam Bly," said he (and I thought it very odious name and nothing suited to that splendid, stately place), "to-night, if it so please you—with myself and Japhet and Oyarana, priest of my priests, you shall tread where never woman trod, where death is, and waiteth, and will be. Well, do you adventure it?"

Now, looking into his beautiful face, I thought again to read there something so sinister, so coldly menacing that for a moment fear gripped me and I was dumb; but glancing now at Japhet and seeing him so assured, so very serene and resolute, I grew resolute also and stifling my fears answered steadily as might be:

"Yes, I will go."

Now forth of the priestly ranks stepped one of complexion darker than his fellows and on his breast the golden sun emblem and in his girdle a long, golden knife and I wondered what use this knife should serve and instinctively stole my hand into Japhet's and found me great comfort in his close, vital clasp.

So thus, hand in hand, we followed whither the Inca and the chief priest led; and this was downward as it seemed into the very bowels of the earth. But now, instead of wide and noble stairway, were narrow flights of steps with many landings and right-angled turns, and on every landing a priest, holding a great taper in golden socket to light us. Thus came we at last to a wall of rock with a dark opening or tunnel, and here they gave us each a taper to light us.

"Oh, Japhet!" I murmured. "Where do they take us?"

"Faith," he answered, "I know no more than you. But thou'rt pale, lass—"

"Hush!" said I, my candle shaking in my hand, for borne to us came a sound like rageful wind that I presently knew for rush of some far-off torrent of water.

"Japhet!" I gasped, "what dreadful place is this?"

"Nay," he answered, "say rather, how wonderful!"

So we went on after our guides along this dismal tunnel until, of a sudden, we came out into a cavern, but of such vast immensity we seemed to be traversing space for naught was to see save the rocky floor we trod; and here that incessant rush of angry water seemed more fierce and loud. In this dreadful gloom and awful silence (for our Indian buskins made no sound) we crossed this mighty cavern—and then I beheld a sight so terrifying that I recoiled and stood trembling (as well I might), for we had reached the brink of a precipice, a frightful chasm I dared not look into, and this yawning gulf spanned by a bridge of rock, a natural causeway, so slender and narrow as turned me faint to see.

"Oh, Japhet!" I gasped, "there is death!"

"Ay, faith," he nodded, "for such fool as essayeth a leap; see, yonder go Will and Oyarana; where they venture we may."

"No!" said I, shuddering away. "No, I dare not!"

"Never say so, ma'm!"

"Ah, Japhet, why must you force on me such dreadful chances?"

"Why, 'tis all in the way of education—"

"I cannot go! I will not!"

"Ay, but you will, lass, you will; even if I have to carry ye."

"Oh, God help me!" I wailed.

"Why, so He will, ma'm, if you are bold to do your share, using those legs o' thine.... Come now, my arm about thee—so!"

"Go you, Japhet—leave me—"

"Not I. Come,—walk! And look not down!"

Then we were upon this narrow bridge. I glimpsed the horror of blackness below, felt my brain reel, heard Japhet swear at me and we were over and I nigh to swooning; but his fierce arm compelled me forward and the faintness passing, I found we were traversing a rocky cleft so strait we must go very close together.

"So, Ursula, you did it."

"And was like to die with horror."

"You should lay out on topgallant yard in a gale, lass."

"Never!" said I, whereat he laughed at me, but I ever the more conscious of that sound of rushing water that had grown to muffled roar. The way we followed now broadened, trending gently downwards and must be leading us, as Japhet said, into the very heart of this great mountain Hualpa; and:

"Lord!" quoth he, "these old Aztecs chose them secure berths to bury their kings and hide their treasures."

"How much further?" said I.

"Why, it cannot be so far—see, Will beckons us yonder! Give me your hand again...." As he spoke, the twinkling lights of our guides vanished suddenly until, turning sharp bend, we saw them again; and now, not content with Japhet's hand, I clutched his arm also, for the way had narrowed again, with on my side the rock wall towering into gloom, and on Japhet's side a black emptiness, a gulf that roared at us and whence breathed a clammy air from unseen water that raged far below. And now all about us such thunderous roar as deafened me and made speech impossible.... Turning another sudden corner, we saw the reason for this and there burst on us such stupendous spectacle as brought us to instant stand.

Immediately before us foamed a mighty cataract, o'erleaping the rocky path, a spuming, high-arching, down-plunging torrent that leapt, out-curving from heights unseen, and rushed to fall in ceaseless thunder down, down amid those roaring deeps. And there, standing beneath this mighty watery arch was Yupanaqui, beckoning us on. So came we beside him and (Oh, most wonderful) though we stood now right beneath this arching torrent, no drop of water touched us,—no,

not one. And here, beneath the everlasting rush of this tremendous cascade, was narrow doorway with dim stair, down which we went and so at last into a chamber of no great magnitude and yet surely such place as few eyes had ever seen. Gold shone everywhere, above, around, ay, even beneath our very feet—this was indeed a great shrine of gold. And against one wall the great sun emblem glowed upon us, radiant in very truth, for this wondrous symbol flashed and glittered with gemmy fire seeming to shoot flames of every hue; and I, all dazzled by this thing of glory, speechless and entranced, would have looked no other where; but Yupanaqui's voice aroused me, his commanding gesture distracted me.

"This now, behold the sacred place, Japhet—for here sit our Inca gods and kings, the first six!" Now looking (and very unwillingly) whither he pointed, I saw six shapes brown and shrivelled that seemed to leer down at me from eyeless sockets and gnash white teeth at me 'twixt backdrawn lips, shapes these more hideous by their splendid trappings. Three and three sat they, these long-dead Inca kings, to right and left of a great, black, low-set stone all carved about with writhing serpents and horrid beasts.

"And here, Japhet, sitteth the Inca Capac Yupanaqui that builded this city. 'Tis after him that I am named." So saying, he brought us where, throned apart, sat a seventh Inca and this methought more terrible than any, for, though more splendid than any, he sat grasping his jewelled diadem in withered hands, since he had no head. Then Japhet took forth the golden skull and gave it to the Inca Yupanaqui who, with the priest to aid him, set it back upon the shoulders of his long-dead ancestor.

Whiles this was a-doing, my glance wandered here and there, viewing the marvels of this golden sanctuary, in especial a golden coffer wherein (to my breathless wonder) sparkled gems of many sorts. But suddenly, moved by some premonition, I glanced at Yupanaqui to see his sad, terrible eyes fixed on me ... then he gestured faintly with his hand and turning, I saw the dark-faced priest flash out his knife and leap at me; quick as he, I sprang away but, even so, he caught me by my hair ... then I was deafened by a pistol shot ... and my assailant reeled back and back, to fall upon that black stone, and the stone, sudden and noiseless, turned beneath him and Oyarana was gone, as he had never been, and Japhet staring wide-eyed, a smoking pistol in his hand. Then I screamed and sank to my knees, faint with the quick horror of it all; yet presently found I was kneeling beside one of the golden coffers, my nerveless hands among its scintillant riches, and instinctively I clutched up two hands full of these gems and so remained, staring fearfully where Japhet and the Inca faced each other.

"By God," said Japhet, soft-voiced but mighty grim, "now, by God, Will, this was foully done. I trusted thee, man; I trusted thee!"

"And I loved thee, Japhet, as a brother I loved thee ... of the blood."

"And would murder my wife—"

"She came betwixt us, Japhet! She is the ruin o' my hopes."

"So ye would ha' murdered her—eh, Will—being no better than mere Indian, after all, my lord Yupanaqui."

"I am—the Inca!"

"And would ha' killed ... my wife."

"Well, the gods have chosen otherwise, Japhet."

"And before my eyes—damn you!" said Japhet, and into his other hand came his second pistol, at sight of which up sprang I, scattering these precious gems broadcast, and interposed, clasping that threatening hand. But Yupanaqui laughed and contrived somehow to make it sound more woeful than any tears.

"I pray thee let be, lady!" said he. "Fair is fair and nothing fear I Death! Shoot, brother Japhet, and be done. Here is much wealth of gold and gems—such baubles as ye of the noble white race do prize before honour or aught in this world, as we Incas do know, alas! When I am dead, take what ye may and joy go with thee, brother."

Uttering an inarticulate growl, Japhet thrust away his pistols and turned to be gone.

"Come, Ursula," said he and reached me his hand. But I must stand looking from the sparkling gems that bestrewed the

golden floor to those which sparkled in the coffer; perceiving which, the stately Inca smiled on me and, sweeping up a double handful from the nearest coffer, bade me open the doeskin gypsire that hung at my girdle, and into it poured this glittering torrent. Then turning to Japhet:

"Sir," said he, "for the friendship that hath been betwixt us and brotherhood that was, I bid you take now ... whatso you will." But, answering not, Japhet seized my arm and led me out from that place of riches and death. Nor was there one word spoke betwixt us on that fearsome backward journey. And surely never was poor soul more thankful than I to see the moon bright above us again and breathe deep of the fragrant night.

"Sir," said the Inca, as we stood in the wide portal of this great Huaca, "you will be away to-morrow, I think."

"Ay, to-morrow, Yupanaqui!" So saying, and without another word, or so much as one backward glance, Japhet turned away. But presently I stopped, and turning:

"Japhet," said I, "yonder is the loneliest man in the world, I think!"

"How? You mean Yupanaqui?"

"I mean your comrade Will."

"Nay, he is the Inca and a bloody-minded Indian!"

"Yet for sake of your old friendship, I would have you go back and speak him kindly, Japhet."

"But Ursula, he would ha' murdered thee!"

"Out of love for you, Japhet. Come, let us go back—"

"Not I, ma'm, not I!"

"Is my welfare then so much to you, Japhet?"

"Now on my soul," quoth he bitterly, "for creature of intelligence ye do ask the most fool questions!"

Now at this, and although he scowled, I could have kissed him—almost. So he brought me to my lodge and then, telling me had much to do, he bade me get me to sleep and so hurried away, fuming still.

And this night, being in bed and my women all gone, it was not of that fearsome journey I must think, nor of the sudden awful end of Oyarana the Priest, but only of the treasure of gems Yupanaqui had bestowed on me, insomuch that I reached my wallet and having made sure no eyes watched, I emptied forth these precious stones and sat trembling with delight by reason of the exceeding beauty of them. With shaking fingers I grouped and counted these wondrous lovely things and found them to be:

Twelve great sapphires,

Seventy-five pearls all very beautiful and extreme large,

Twenty-nine rubies, one very wonderful for size and colour,

Forty-one diamonds, very splendid, in especial six,

Nine emeralds, all these large.

In all, one hundred and sixty-six.

And now, having hidden them in the wallet again, I sat with this in my hand, full of anxious thought as to how best I might keep such fortune safe and unseen, and how guard against all chance of losing it by accident or theft, so that what with this anxiety I was long in falling to sleep.

CHAPTER XXXV

TELLETH HOW WE VOYAGED ON AND WITH US THE SPIRIT OF HATE

My eyes were aswim with tears as I kissed farewell to these gentle maids had served me so tenderly, for though I yearned to be gone, it grieved me to leave them, in especial my sweet Lualla; thus when at last came Jeremy Jervey to summon me, he found us mingling our tears and all very woeful and most especially my pretty Lualla.

Taking Jeremy's hand, I suffered him to lead me away, stumbling, since tears were blinding me, and being thus deject, grew angry also:

"And pray," I demanded, "why must he trouble you; why could not his lordly godship come for me himself?"

"Why now, lady, lookee, he do be that full o' business,—love my eyes, I should say so! Ay, and what's more, so soon as 'twere known as he's a-marching—these here Ayamaras and Cachapuyas must be for marching wi' him. And so 'tis as he aren't a-going to march arter all, d'ye see."

"Not?" cried I in quick dismay (and despite my grief). "Do you mean we ... I must bide here?"

"No, no, ma'm I mean ter say as you'm going by the river, ay—and in Yupanaqui's own piragua or as you might say canoe, ma'm. Fifty odd miles 'twill take ye till it joins the Guanuco River; then in two days' march ye should bring up in Bartlemy's Bay."

Now the prospect of gliding smoothly along this beautiful river, instead of trudging wearily through the wild, pleased me greatly, as I told him.

"Ay, ay, ma'm," nodded Jeremy. "A piragua's a handy craft, so long as ye don't go running foul of any alligators or—"

"Alligators?" I gasped, horrified.

"Ay, lady, you'll see plenty o' they. But, Lord, they won't nowise trouble you, if you don't go a-troubling o' they. Well, I shall be main sorry to bid ee good-bye ma'm."

"So shall I, Jeremy," I answered, giving his brawny arm a little squeeze. "Why don't you come back with us?"

"Lord love ye, ma'm, and what o' my wives, ay, and all my children?"

"Have you so many children, Jeremy?"

"Ninety and four, ma'm, and others on the road; so, d'ye see, here I must abide."

"Yes!" said I... "Oh, yes."

"But Mrs. Ursula, ma'm, if you should ever chance Deptford way—but what use, my old mother's dead years ago and Lord knoweth what's come o' my brothers and sisters."

By this time we were in sight of the river where many Indians were busied about a long canoe, stowing divers stores therein; a very shapely craft I deemed it. And here I beheld my lord the Earl or rather, Mr. Barrasdale, all clean-shaven and very sullen, his six grave Indians in attendance.

"Aha!" he cried, catching sight of me. "Fore heaven, Ursula, I protest you make a bewitching Indian! That scant and simple habit—from stately head to proud feet proclaims thee truly goddess, veiling her glories in peasant guise."

"Nay, thank heaven I'm done with my goddess-ship," said I, angered by something in his tone and look. "And I go thus, sir, because I must, since my own poor garments were merest rags and these Indian clothes are cooler and leave me more free."

"Faith, 'tis evident!" he nodded. "And, 'pon my life, thou'rt delicious so—"

"Mr. Barrasdale," said I, dwelling on the name, "you are fulsome!" At this, he stared on me beneath wrinkling brows,

then smiled disdainfully.

"Soho!" he exclaimed. "Our Piratical Slave-driver hath told you this preposterous lie, then?"

"No, sir," I retorted. "This is a truth I found out for myself."

"Truth, d'ye say? Truth, madam? Pah, you never credit such arrant folly—"

"Mr. Barrasdale, I know beyond all doubt that Japhet is truly Charles Vivian Japhet Barrasdale, Earl of Aldbourne, and this I am ready to swear in any court of law—"

"And now, madam, how can you dare be so sure?"

"This you shall hear in court of law, when he comes safe home to England, sir. For the present know this,—do or say what you will, Mr. Barrasdale, I am as sure your cousin Japhet is truly the Earl as you yourself are certain in your secret heart. And I repeat,—to this I will swear if ever we reach England—"

"If!" he repeated. "Ay—if, madam, for we are a very long way from England!"

"Is this a threat, sir?" I demanded. But he merely smiled and, shrugging his shoulders, turned away as came Japhet at last and clad in his familiar, travel-worn garments, as I was glad to see, and with many stately caciques, and chief among them Huayana who, coming to me, took my hand, touching it to his brow; but nowhere could I see the Inca Yupanaqui.

All being ready, we embarked, Mr. Barrasdale in the prow, then I, and behind me in the stern, Japhet; and now, with Jeremy Jervey's hearty good wishes ringing in our ears and the deep, sweet tones of the stately caciques, we glided out and away from this strange and wonderful city of Viracocha, Japhet paddling easily; the Earl—that is Mr. Barrasdale, scowling on vacancy and I clutching at the treasure hidden within my bosom. But after we had gone some little way, I turned about that I might look my last on Viracocha and watch Japhet how he paddled.

"Easy, ma'm, easy!" said he, for my movement had shaken the canoe. "These piraguas are something crank till you be used to them. In a while you shall move as you will, ay, and walk in 'em too, but you must first learn the way on't."

"And you shall show me how to paddle," said I, taking up one of several. "And how beautifully they are carved."

"Ay, these folk be notable craftsmen."

Now, glancing back at the city, I saw it rising majestic, terrace upon terrace, until it was crowned as it were and dominated by the great Huaca; and upon this eminence, gazing down on us and awfully alone, stood the Inca, as I told Japhet, who stopped paddling to glance back also; whereupon that most solitary figure raised both arms, crossing them above his head, and Japhet, after a moment's hesitation, laid down his paddle and did the same; so that I must ask him what this meant.

"Why," said he, paddling on again, "we make the sign of amity and brotherhood."

"I'm glad," said I, "yes, very glad!"

"Art a queer soul, Ursula," says he, looking at me and forgetting to paddle. "A sweetly kind, marvellous forgiving creature—to all save poor Japhet, of course. I wonder why?"

"'Tis soon told," I answered, shaking my head at him in sorrowful reproach. "Poor Japhet is too assured, too fiercely masterful and, above all—too set on his divers revenges."

"In fine, Ursula, this thy poor Japhet is no more than his poor self."

"Indeed," sighed I, "and there's the pity of it, for this poor wretch might be a great earl and man truly noble."

"Enough o' this, ma'm. Say no more—"

"Ay, but I will, Japhet. For, mark you, though you lost one witness, a just heaven hath sent you another; for here she sits, ready and able to swear to your identity in any court in England so soon as we get there—ay, and so I will do yet, whether you will or no,—as I told your wicked cousin yonder, only this morning—"

At this Japhet stared at me for a moment in blank amazement then, leaning near:

"God forbid!" he murmured. "Oh, girl, you were never such crass fool to tell John this—no, no—"

"Ay, but I did," said I, boldly enough, though quailing beneath his sudden fierce gaze. "Well, why not?"

"How then, are ye so blind, Ursula; don't you see it? D'ye suppose such damned rogue, such cold, calculating villain, will ever suffer us to reach England, there to prove and publicly proclaim his villainy? No, by God; he'll die first or see to it that you do."

"I cannot believe it of him—" I began, and then remembering his covert threat, when he had cast doubt on my ever reaching England (as I have set down), I shivered. "Oh, Japhet," I murmured, "do you mean he would actually ... kill me?"

"I mean he will certainly take any and every means to ensure your silence—ay, for should you speak and prove his roguery, it would mean shame and prison, and this were worse than death to him."

"And yet, Japhet, I cannot believe him so utterly wicked."

"Say ye so, ma'm, fool? Art indeed so purblind, so dull-witted not to ha' sensed something o' the foul black soul of him? Howbeit, Ursula, your curst folly hath made of him such dire menace to be watched and warded against, so shall his lot be the harder."

Now though to be thus scornfully berated and railed on naturally angered me, yet to hear Japhet put my own secret doubts and fears into words kept me dumb, so that, turning my back on him, I watched where his cousin sat crouched at the far end of this great canoe; and the longer I watched the unconscious form of him (for he kept his face averted from us), the more my apprehension increased upon me, and then, before I might speak:

"What, Johnny man, pluck up!" cried Japhet in his hateful, jeering voice. "Another eight or nine days and you shall be snug in your irons aboard the *Deliverance*." At this Mr. Barrasdale turned and stared at us and, reading all the dark menace in his look, I quailed instinctively, but:

"Mr. John," said I, boldly enough, "you should know that I have informed your cousin Japhet how I shall witness to his true identity, yes, and ... testify against you, Mr. John, if we should ever reach England again."

Mr. Barrasdale glanced from me to Japhet and back, with the same sinister expression.

"Why, so you would, Ursula," he answered, "it was but natural. And having told him, what said the noble gentleman?"

"Oh, Mr. John, he warns me that I have made you a menace to my safety hereafter."

"And how think you, Madam Ursula?"

"I cannot," said I passionately (and almost against my own better judgment), "I will not think such evil of you."

"Well, this is to be seen," he answered, smiling grimly. "Japhet should know me—somewhat."

"Why, so I do, Johnny, man," laughed Japhet fiercely: "ay, every kink o' the black and slimy soul of thee, and this giveth me pause how to apportion thy fate, Johnny—as thus: whether shalt pine and languish 'neath slave whips, or be carried to England and there branded in smug court o' law for the damned rogue and liar you are!"

Japhet had ceased paddling, Mr. Barrasdale crouched livid-faced, his fists clenched, and thus for dreadful moment, they glared eye to eye, as they would have leapt to slay each other, for all the world like two savage beasts, as I told them very plainly as, sitting betwixt them, I threw out an arm against each.

"Now then," cried I scornfully, "will you be murdering each other and me too? Shame on ye both and especially you, Japhet ... see how we are drifting!" And I showed him how our frail craft, all unmanaged, had floated perilously shorewards, though the river had broadened out and ran sluggish between dense, overhanging trees, and in the water all about us gnarled roots and submerged logs.

"Eh, logs, ma'm, d'ye say?" quoth he, with grim smile,— "here be no logs—watch now!" So saying, he splashed with his

paddle and I choked back a scream of horror, for these, that I had thought tree roots and stumps, became imbued with dreadful life and movement, sinking from sight or splashing away from us; and one fearsome monster opened great jaws horridly fanged and of a loathsome pinkish-grey.

"Merely alligators, ma'm," saith Japhet. "Now were I black-hearted as Cousin Johnny yonder, I should feed Cousin Johnny to 'em and so rid us o' the trouble and menace of him,—how say you, Ma'm Bly?"

"Oh, paddle!" quoth I, shuddering. "Take me away from this hateful place this moment, ere I grow sick."

"Ay, ay, ma'm! What, Johnny man, you hear? Take paddle and put your back into 't." Mutely Mr. John obeyed and presently we were speeding along these dreadful waters, and I glancing fearfully hither and yon; for now, despite its everchanging beauty, this river was for me a thing of horror with such monstrous evils to lurk about us all unseen; moreover, and beyond these terrors was the dread of what might eventuate between these two cousins: Japhet so implacable in his scornful hate and Mr. John so fiercely defiant, a desperate man who bided his time, patiently waiting the chance to smite his oppressor, I was very sure; the which belief so wrought on me that I determined to be ever on the watch. Thus as our long, graceful canoe skimmed smoothly over this crystal highway, I began to scheme how I might keep the peace betwixt these so bitter enemies. Indeed, as I hearkened to the ceaseless, rhythmic plash and beat of their paddles, and they themselves so grimly silent, more than once, as night approached, I uttered a voiceless prayer, beseeching God would show me some way to win them to a kinder fellowship; yet scarce were we landed to stretch our cramped limbs and make camp for the night, than the first thing Japhet does is to take a pair of fetters from our baggage and, pistol in hand, compel Mr. Barrasdale to lock them upon his wrists, the which methought great shame, as I told him.

"How, ma'm, how?" quoth he, scowling. "Shame, say ye—why, so 'tis, yet yourself is cause of it; your tongue hath clacked to such tune that Johnny, being desperate may endeavour against us more than he hath dared as yet; so if our Johnny's lot prove the harder, let him curse your prattle, ma'm. Howbeit, I'll take such reasonable precautions 'gainst dying suddenly in my sleep. And now water, ma'm—from the rill yonder—sweet water; 'tis the reason we camp here, and bustle, ma'm. You there, Johnny—sticks for the fire, whiles I secure the canoe."

And presently came darkness and though our fire burned cheerily and our simple meal soon prepared, I for one ate with scant appetite, since what with Japhet's scowling looks and the dismal clank of Mr. John's fetters, the which he jangled often as he might, all this so wrought upon me that I could at last by no means endure, so I turned on them, railing on them for dumb fools, brute beasts, mute stock-fishes, and aught I could lay tongue to. "For look how ye sit here," cried I, "grown men, yet like naughty children or sullen, quarrelsome boys, glowering askance on one another so hatefully mum-chance—"

"Ma'm," quoth Japhet, cocking an eyebrow, "silence is golden—"

"Ursula," said Mr. John, clashing his fetters. "Speech is wholly inadequate."

"So I hold my peace, ma'm—"

"And I save my breath, Ursula, to better purpose."

"Ay, but to what purpose, Mr. John," cried I earnestly. "Oh, sir, I pray you be bold to speak your mind. Oh, Japhet and you, Mr. John, the evils committed, the harms endured are past and done with, so let them be forgot betwixt ye and think only of the future."

"Why, Ursula, so I do," answered Mr. John, scowling on Japhet, "and very evil future I am promised."

"Yes, verily!" nodded Japhet, scowling on him.

"So you see, Ursula," said Mr. John very grimly, "to thus tamely submit to such fate is beyond nature, or mine at least. As to what purpose, well—this is yet to be seen; only let my accursed gaoler be wary—aha—waking and asleep—"

"Never doubt it, Johnny my rogue—"

"Ah, no—no!" cried I, kneeling between them. "See now Fate or Destiny or God Himself hath brought you thus together for nobler purpose than self-destroying hate or cruel vengeance that once achieved is but emptiness. Mr. John, pledge me your word to attempt no sudden violence! For the wickedness of years ago school yourself to endure patiently and so

win redemption and, as I hope and pray and do verily believe, forgiveness at last—"

"Impossible!" cried he in sudden passion. "Behold these shameful fetters on my wrist, Ursula! I were thrice fool to shackle myself further with such promise—"

"Nor would I believe such promise from those perjured lips, sweet cousin Johnny!" quoth Japhet, smiling, yet very hatefully. "Well, no more o' this! Come now, so soon as the supper things be washed and stowed, I'll seize you up fast to yonder tree, Johnny—"

"How then," cried I wildly. "Have you no mercy, Japhet, no faith in God or man?"

"In God—ay!" he answered. "In man—sometimes, but in our John—not I, ma'm; no, never a jot—"

"But think—think!" cried I. "So many weary miles and ever on the watch! Hate ever rampant betwixt you ... sealing your lips ... not one kind word—oh, anything but this dreadful, threatening silence—"

"Why then, I'll sing you chanty, lass, ay, and Johnny shall ring changes in his fetters—clash, Johnny, clash!" And forthwith he began singing his old song of Yo-ho, whereat, clasping hands to my ears, I could have struck him, but screamed instead and so fell to passion of tears:

"God forgive you for such cruel mockery—God may but—not I!" And then, as I sobbed thus upon my knees, and he staring on me quite dismayed, from somewhere in the surrounding darkness sudden, loud and dreadfully near rose a horrible screeching voice and the words it uttered these:

"The Innocent Blood ... the Innocent Blood—'od rot ye for damned murderer, the fire everlasting—to hell—to hell—to hell!"

CHAPTER XXXVI

GIVETH EXPLANATION OF THIS TERRIBLE CRY AND OF A STRANGE WAYFARER

Terror and amaze hushed the sob upon my lips for in this voice was something so wildly inhuman and the words themselves so dreadful that my very flesh grew chill.

Japhet was up, peering narrow-eyed across the fire, pistol a gleam in his ever-ready hand, and no sound, as it seemed in all the world; then was vague whirr of sound and silence again.

"What," gasped I, whispering, "what can it be ... Japhet—"

"How shall I know?" he answered gruffly and began to creep forward towards the leafy gloom beyond the kindly firelight—but checked suddenly, as once again rose that most fearsome cry yet now from such distance as but intensified my terror, since I knew nothing human might speed so fast and far. Thus, stricken motionless and dumb, we hearkened all three until, for the third time we heard it, though now so faint with distance the awful words were but a mumbling scream.

"Well," quoth Mr. John, passing fettered hand across his damp brow, "whatever it was, 'tis gone, thank God."

"God, says you?" sneered Japhet. "God, eh, Johnny? Well, the Devil can quote Scripture, they say. Now should your black soul be harbouring schemes o' murder and what not—think rather on the Fire Everlasting and heed yon devil's warning!"

"Ha, Japhet!" snarled Mr. John between snapping teeth, "ha, right accursed cousin, think you on this—some night when you lie sunk in slumber—I shall be awake! Some day when your painful vigilance nods, Chance shall beckon me! Sometime, Japhet, I shall hold thee at point o' sword or knife—or muzzle o' pistol. So, damned gaoler, be wary! Watch ever and sleep light—"

"Sayst thou, Johnny, sayst thou?" quoth Japhet, soft-voiced. "Lookee now! When we see a noxious insect, we step on it, or loathly reptile, we kill it, Johnny."

Mr. John got him very nimbly to his feet and I saw his face deathly pale as he crouched, peering where sat Japhet cross-legged and pistol in hand; so for a moment they viewed each other and both of them dreadfully still and mute.

"So then ... wouldst murder me, Japhet?"

"Ay," he nodded, "as I would any other ravening beast—'twere but natural!" And speaking, he levelled the pistol across his knee and I heard the click of trigger as he cocked it, while in the fierce jut of his chin, grim mouth and glaring eyes I read such terrible purpose that I screamed instantly, to distract him, and leaping up, planted myself before his shrinking victim.

"Come then, Japhet," said I, gazing down on him, steady-eyed and resolute. "Come, right noble lord and husband, shoot if you will ... and when I'm dead, take your other pistol and murder your enemy—"

"Sink me—but here would be no murder, lass; it should be no more than act of plain common sense, very reasonable—stand away now!"

"Howbeit," said I, not moving, "shoot me first, for, Japhet, I swear by the God that seeth us, my husband shall not prove vile murderer and I live to know it."

"And 'fore heaven!" exclaimed Mr. John. "Would I might call thee wife; yet even so I'd scorn to shield me with thy sweet body!" Then, with hands compelling yet gentle, he set me aside and took a pace nearer that levelled pistol.

"Have at me, Japhet!" quoth he. "Here, man, 'twixt the eyes! Yet first to nerve thy trigger, here on the brink of death, hear me say—'twas indeed my father and I schemed thee out o' thy heritage, aha! Sent thee into slavery, Japhet! And oh, man, the mere thought of the shames you suffered, the pains you endured, is joy to me now, so perfectly do I hate you! Come then shoot and make an end, murder me and be damned. Come—give fire!"

Japhet uncocked and laying by both his pistols, rose.

"So, Johnny, here's the truth on't at last!" said he, in his sleepy voice. "Expectant of death, ye dared speak truth and wert ready to pour out thy rogue's blood in expiation! Well, so ye may, lad, so ye may, but—not by my hand. If I kill thee, John, it shall be foot to foot in fight. Meantime," saith he, reaching coil of stout cord where it lay ready to hand, "I'll tie thee up, Johnny man, lest you steal on me in my sleep and brain me with your fetters,—so come your ways, Johnny, come!" Then he led Mr. John among a grove of trees and having there tied him secure (for I watched him), back he cometh and with no word or look for me, sits him in the firelight, his back 'gainst convenient tree, and stares, and stares, thus silent and pensive, upon the leaping flame.

Now presently I rose and seated myself beside him, but with never a word, he all unheeding and both of us gazing on the fire; after some while I stole my hand into his, though still we spake not and he apparently quite unaware, so that, nestling my fingers more boldly in his firm clasp, at last I spoke, making him look at me, as thus:

I: Prithee, Japhet, why so silent and doleful?

HE: (*Gloomily*) I wonder at myself.

I: (*Happily*) Indeed and so do I ... so much that to-night, Japhet, I respect you far more than my poor words can tell: I honour you with all my heart.

HE: (*Sullenly*) Ho! And is this all?

I: (*Turning on him indignantly*) How, sir, is this so little? Doth it not satisfy your lordship?

HE: (*Turning on me*) No!

I: (*Averting my head*) Oh! Well, to-night I'm proud of thee.

HE: (*Bitterly*) Because I did not shoot a rogue?

I: (*Tenderly*) Because thou art so strong to conquer thyself and ... evil passions, Japhet. And—why?

HE: Let Echo answer. For here's myself telling myself I'm sorry fool to suffer that such villainy live to be our constant menace.

I: Nay, he is tied up very fast, we may sleep secure to-night.

HE: Yet suppose he win free some other night and we fast slumbering?

I: God's hand will be over us then as now.

HE: Such blind faith is beyond all reason.

I: Yet can move mountains. Faith is a mighty power, Japhet, and shall perchance turn evil to good and make this world a paradise at last.

HE: Yet—not for me!

I: For both of us, Japhet—mayhap.

HE: As how?

I: (*Leaning me against him, softly intimate*) Well,—to-night,—and thou so vile grim and fierce—when I cried on thee to shoot, yet, in my heart, I had faith in thee, Japhet, and lo, now, this hand (*here I wriggled my fingers in his clasp*) this dear hand goeth unfouled of thy enemy's blood and so—(here or ever he knew, I stooped suddenly and kissed it).

Now at this he was silent and so long that at last I must needs steal a glance at him to find he was viewing me with such look as set my heart a-leaping in such wild fashion that instinctively I shrunk from him, whereat he snatched his hand from my clasp like any petulant boy.

"What, then," I questioned meekly, "have I angered thee?"

"No!" he answered very ungraciously. "But I'm a man little used to such womanish caresses, d' ye see; so belay, lass, belay ... up and get thee to bed, or sink me, but you'll be kissing my lips next, and then—ha, get thee to roost! Under the tree yonder!"

So saying, up he got and busied himself mending the fire; and with never another glance for me. So, after some while, I arose and, coming to the tree he had indicated, found he had strewed ferns for my bed and set thereby an Indian blanket

to my comfort. Then I drew off my buskins, and these all trimmed and adorned with arabesques of tiny pearls and quillwork very pretty, loosed my girdle, drew off my upper garment and, folding the blanket about me, lay down. And now I became aware of the fortune of gems hidden in my bosom and, clutching it in both hands, marvelled that I should have forgotten all about it and for so long; yet even as I held it thus, I instantly forgot it again and rose to an elbow, for Japhet was standing within a yard of me.

"Art sleepy, Ursula?" he enquired in his cultured, most gentle voice.

"No!" I answered, reaching out my hand to him. "Come you beside me."

"Why then, easy, ma'm, easy!" quoth he, in his odious sailorman's speech. "No more kissing and what not to fright a modest mariner—"

"Nay, you may venture!" said I, snuggling under my blanket again; whereat he seats himself beside me and very much nearer than I expected.

"Ursula, hast ever fired a pistol?"

"Oh, sir, be sure I have, once or twice."

"Good, then here's a brace for thee," and he shewed two little pistols very fine and mounted with silver. "These shall be easy to carry on you, being so small, yet they shall be deadly enough at point-blank. I had them of Will ... Yupanaqui."

"But why must I bear the hateful things, Japhet?"

"To your own protection—ay, and mine. I may not be always near thee when danger threatens, or asleep—"

"You mean—Mr. John?"

"Ay, him or any other menace. So take them, Ursula. Keep them near you day and night."

"No!" said I, shaking my head. "Keep you the nasty things, I'll have none other protection save you, Japhet."

"But damme, ma'm," says he suddenly peevish, "I cannot be for ever watching over ye."

"Ha, curses, sir!" I retorted. "And pray why not?"

"Nay, but," says he, avoiding my gaze, "how should I?"

"Lord, man!" I exclaimed, sitting up the better to retort on him, "are you not my natural protector? Have you not made yourself answerable for me and my welfare, sleeping and waking, by day and by night, to the very end of my life? You have! And shall I not therefore look to you for food, drink, raiment, shelter and such other comforts as you may contrive me? I shall! Therefore Captain Japhet Bly, most noble my lord, since you forced me to wed you by an odious trick and are my husband, alas!—to my husband will I look for protection and not your two nasty little pistols—sir, have I your attention?"

"Indeed, ma'm!" he answered, bowing.

"Then what do you stare at?"

"These, madam—your white arms," said he, kissing the nearest or ever I might prevent. "They are lovely as your legs or —"

"Japhet, have done!" gasped I, catching the blanket about me; "you become very loosely wanton, sir!"

"Nay, ma'm," sighed he, "this was only poor Japhet, your humble spouse, your meek, unwanted husband, dared remark his own property so address his proud, unloving, lovely wife."

"Howbeit," said I, nestling down in my bed again, "she prefers her one poor Japhet to your two pistols, sir."

"Alack and woe is me!" quoth he, shaking his head.

"Well?" I demanded, viewing his profile against the fire, the lofty brow and resolute jut of nose and chin, "Well, prithee, what now?"

"Now," sighed he, "were you any other than my lady Finical Contrariness, all prideful, passionate prudery—and I a creature less mild and meek—now should I kiss thee. But I am but thy poor, humble Japhet and—"

"Oh,—" gasped I and reaching suddenly, clasped his hand, "Ah, Japhet," said I, now upon the very brink of tears, "it is verily because you might make of poor me your slave, yet suffer me to seem a very goddess ruling you as I will ... it is because you show so tender of me and forbearing that sometimes ... I ..."

"Yes, my dear?" he questioned gently, for I had choked upon a sob; but his question I answered with another.

"Supposing I ... should fall in love with my husband?"

"I should esteem it a marvel, Ursula. And how then?"

"Why then, Japhet, his way would be mine,—and mine, his."

"And what of England?" said he.

"Nay, what of your vengeance on your cousin and these ship captains?" I demanded.

"Hum!" quoth he, and kissing my hand, stood up. "Art plaguy determined creature, ma'm!"

"I begin to think so," I answered.

"Ay, but—so am I!" said he, wry-smiling. "Moreover, I'm bound by sacred oath.... As to love, my dear, in my intervals of piratical throat-cutting, I have read that love, being passion o' the soul, riseth 'bove our human reason, coming all unsought and or ever we are aware,—thus we love, not wisely and because we would, but blindly and because we must, and were yours indeed such love, you would love me despite yourself, ay, and my oath o' vengeance the which is such sacred oath—"

"Your oath!" cried I scornfully and up I sat again, clean forgetting my naked arms. "Will you waste your life to such idle purpose, nay the bloody fulfilment of such wicked oath?"

"Ha, ma'm," quoth he, as bitterly contemptuous, "and must you bribe me with your body to dishonour such oath—?"

"Bribe you!" gasped I, "my body—"

"Ay, ma'm, seduce me wi' vague promise o' supposititious love—"

"Oh, beast ... oh, hateful man!" cried I, "to dare think I would stoop to such infamy. Out of my sight—"

But even as I spoke, I cowered, my passion of anger choked by quick terror as in the very air above me rang that awful cry, wilder, harsher, more dreadful than ever:

"The Innocent Blood! 'od rot ye for damned murderer! The Fire Everlasting! To hell, to hell, to hell!"

I saw Japhet turn to front what might be; and then another voice spoke:

"Belay, Brother! Shoot not, friend, for friend am I." And into the light of our fire stepped the oddest figure I had ever seen.

A bony man of undetermined age for, though the hair that bushed him, head and face, was grizzled, his eyes glowed bright and he bore himself with a youthful vigour; he was dressed something as an Indian; about his middle was a wide belt whence dangled a broad-bladed knife, a pouch and a human skull; girt to his shoulders was a leathern pack and upon the crown of his broad-eaved hat, all vivid red and blue and green, was perched a bright-eyed parrot bird.

CHAPTER XXXVII

TELLETH OF ONE THAT WAS VERY SOLITARY, A MAN REMORSEFUL

"Well," demanded Japhet none too kindly, as he uncocked the pistol he had levelled, "who the devil are you and what would you?"

"I am Remorse, Brother, and would atone. Here 'pon my head sitteth Conscience, to mind me what I am and what my ultimate fate—except by service I win redemption! Oh, boy—ho, boy, speak and denounce me what I am!" So saying, the man reached up and took the parrot on his wrist, and the bird fluttered with its wings and once again filled the air with its harsh and dreadful words.

"So there's for ye, good friends!" quoth the man. "Here stand I manslayer proclaimed and murderer of my friend."

"And sink me," saith Japhet, eyeing the speaker askance, "you talk wildly as your bird—"

"Yet, Brother, with reason."

"Well, who are you and what would you with us?"

"Talk with ye, Brother, and hearken to the good sweet English my ears do hunger for; as to the who of me,—Matthew Swayne am I, A.M. and M.D., Doctor of Medicine and student of London, Padua and Leyden, and I go hither and yon, up and down this river to doctor these poor savages—ay, ministering to them body and soul, a servant and friend to the poorest, seeking thus to purge me and win perchance forgiveness of an angered God."

"Then you know this river and country hereabouts?"

"As my hand, Brother, every Indian village and township 'twixt here and the River of Amazons, ay and beyond. And my home is everywhere or anywhere, that is to say—here. So here, by your leaves, I'll bide a while and talk."

"Nay, Master Swayne," says Japhet very ungraciously and beginning to frown on this poor, strange man, "the hour is late and we must be on our course by dawn—"

"Yea, Master Swayne," said I, "bide you and welcome, for the hour is never too late to show kindness on such solitary wanderer as yourself."

"Madame, receive my humble thanks!" said he, favouring me with so deep a bow the parrot on his shoulder made mighty ado with fluttering wings to keep his balance. "It is long and long since I had the joy to speak with an English lady. Yet first, sweet lady, ere you suffer me, let due confession be made: Fifteen years ago, with malice aforethought and having not the fear of God before my eyes, I, Matthew Swayne, did, in moment of passion, discharge a pistol ball into the body of one Luke Marshall, my friend, whereof he presently died. Now lady, oh, sweet child, knowing me the lost and grievous soul I am, wilt endure me a while, wilt suffer me, outcast wretch, to company with thee a space?"

"Ay, to be sure, sir," said I heartily. "Pray do."

"Then may the Lord requite thee!" quoth he and loosing off his great pack, sat down over against me in the fireglow and on his shoulder the parrot, silent now and viewing me very narrowly, turning its beautiful plumed head this way and that to stare on me first with one round bright eye and then the other; while Japhet near by watched neath sullen brow.

"You watch Jeremiah, lady—my parrot? 'Tis a conscience to plague me, and I have taught him thus to trumpet forth my sin that all may know me for what I am. And 'tis an apt bird, for besides English, he speaketh divers Indian dialects."

"Indeed, sir, 'tis wonderful bird and beautiful to see, yet speaketh terrible words."

"Ay, he doth, child, he doth indeed and with reason, child, for she was one and we two: thus poor Luke that had been my friend and schoolfellow became my enemy that I followed across the world and slew.... And as he lay a-dying—'Oh, Matt,' says he, 'you'll grieve for this unto your dying day: so am I avenged on thee and so do I forgive thee, for, Matt, she died two years ago; thus have you sent me—up to her. Yet my blood shall cry out on thee, Matt, shall foul thy soul, lad, till thy Redemption.' 'Then, oh Luke,' says I, for seeing him dying thus, all my hate was clean forgot. 'Oh, Luke, old

friend,' says I, wetting his pale face with my tears, 'how shall I ever win redemption?' 'By service, Matt, serve and be redeemed. And so, poor soul, fare thee well!' After this he lingers a while to moan and groan, with these my arms about him, and towards nightfall dies.... Look now, here is poor Luke's skull—nay, blench not, child; 'tis holy relic that I bear along to pray over; and whenso death takes me, I'll die with my old comrade's head upon my breast."

And here he takes the dreadful thing in his two hands, as it had indeed been something sacred, looking down at it with such eyes as made me forget horror in a pity I could not speak.

"What, Luke," quoth he tenderly, "what, Luke old friend, for the one life I took I have saved very many; I have served, Luke, I have slaved in sickness and health and shall so do whiles I have strength, yet God showeth no sign save that I—I cannot die. Diseases, hardship, wounds, much o' these have I known, yet do I flourish. And I dare scarce pray.... How long, old friend, oh, Luke prithee, how long?" And instantly the parrot fluttered its wings as it had been gifted with a demoniac understanding and uttered its fearful answer: Whereat his master bowed grey head and sat like one stricken, and so utterly hopeless that to distract his woeful thoughts I questioned him concerning his travels and work among the Indians.

"Aha, lady," saith he, looking on me bright-eyed, "I am chirurgeon, apothecary and leech. Here in this case I bear my instruments surgical, probe, forceps, scalpel, scissors. In my pack yonder be herbs and simples a-many, with roots and barks for electuaries and infusions...." And now he falls to such learned discourse as went far beyond my understanding, so that I began to nod (do what I would) and presently nodded myself into a doze; but rousing to mumble of voices, saw Japhet and Master Swayne, cheek by jowl, and the doctor drawing as it were designs upon the ground with a stick and each of them very intent, though to what purpose I knew not nor cared for, my drowsiness increasing upon me, I fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

WHICH IS CHAPTER TO LITTLE PURPOSE

Awaking to a vivid dawn, I sat up and thus beheld Japhet still asleep and couched so near that I might have touched him; and between us, ready to hand, lay his pistols and sheathed sword; against a tree, within easy reach, stood his long musket, but himself so lost in slumber that I (or any other, for that matter) might have disarmed him very easily; the which fact perturbed me not a little.

Now seeing him thus unconscious of me, and all things else, I leaned nearer to gaze down on him, viewing his bronzed face feature by feature; and, either by reason of our constant association or better understanding, a very comely man I thought him. Then, and suddenly, I saw the sly wretch was awake after all, for his lips curved to their quirkish smile and he murmured, eyes fast shut the while:

"Buss me, lass, buss me and be done; if thou'rt for kissing thy Japhet, kiss—nor keep him in suspense."

Here, or ever I could find reply, came the dismal clanking of Mr. John's fetters, so up I rose and having mended the fire for preparing breakfast, looked vainly round about for our strange visitant of last night.

"So the poor doctor is gone sudden as he appeared, Japhet," said I.

"Why, 'twould seem so."

"The unfortunate creature was surely crazed, a little mad, I think."

"Ay, and yet a something reasonable madman."

Now here, lest my careful relation of these and the like small matters (though a joy to me) prove tedious to others in the reading, I will pass over much in regard to the growing intimacies of our daily intercourse and will hasten on to describe those events which dread me to think on even now, events indeed so very hatefully vile I would not here record them but that I needs must do so, or leave my tale untold.

So will I pass over certain days of our journey, though each was various as this mighty river that bore us through an everchanging country; and every day my companions, these two cousins, 'stead of bearing themselves like the kinsmen and gentlemen they were, showed more like unto quarrelsome hobbledoys, rageful enemies or ferocious beasts snarling upon each other as eager for savage, rending strife. Thus, instead of three, we were four, since with us ever went the sullen Spirit of Hate, the which I set myself to combat when and howsoever I might and with such womanly weapon as I possessed, to wit—my tongue. To this end I watched them constantly and with instant word or gesture would mock at their fierce looks and turn aside their bitter revilings, lest from such word and look they fall to murderous action and do each other sudden violence.

And thus was I employed upon this sunny morning as our long, graceful piragua bore us along this crystal tide, 'neath great trees that arching overhead made a green tunnel shot athwart by vivid beams of sunshine.

"Now out upon you—both!" cried I, looking from my sullen Japhet to fierce-eyed Mr. John. "To so waste your breath on each other to such idle purpose! I grow aweary of your vicious threats and murderous looks, so, an you cannot endure sight of each other, look other where, and if you must talk, speak to me or a mercy's sake be dumb!"

"And how a-plague," growls Japhet, forgetting to paddle, "how the plague, ma'm, shall I be dumb and yonder black rogue vaunting his rascality, twitting me with his villainy?"

"Or I," quoth Mr. John, also ceasing to paddle; "prithee, Ursula, how shall I keep silent and my cut-throat cousin forever jibing at me and—"

"Oh, peace!" cried I. "Be silent both and hear me."

"Well, ma'm?" demanded Japhet. "And what then?"

"Say on, Ursula, I beg!" quoth Mr. John. "Your voice is sweet music after Japhet's harsh ranting—"

"This!" said I, glancing at each fierce visage in turn. "Despite this hate for each other that you nurse and cosset with such tender care, I do believe that blood shall prove thicker than water and, should a common danger threaten us, you would forget all save that you be kinsmen and Englishmen and strive side by side for your own sakes—or mine. Nay, scowl not, sirs, for I mind how you, Japhet, at peril of your life saved Mr. John from dreadful death in the morass; and you, Mr. John, I dare to swear would so peril your life for Japhet. And believing this, I am for ever praying that some day soon or late the God of Circumstance, the God of this great wilderness, the God that is also Father to us all, shall lead and show you the folly of hate, the wisdom of forgetting past wrongs and the joy of forgiveness.... To be sure," said I, finding them both silent, "I know that being men, ye are no more than great, silly children, blindly reckless and headstrong, but here in this perilous wilderness be such men to forget your childish hate or, an' ye must be children, be then children of God. Howbeit, it is for this I pray, Mr. John; 'tis thus, Japhet, I do supplicate that so kind and merciful God by Whose will we are yet alive."

Now after this they were silent both; and small wonder! Thus we went and no sound at all save the soft ripple of our going until, rounding a bend in the river, we came where this watery highway divided and became two,—the one flowing broad and smooth upon our left, the other winding narrow and shady with trees to our right; and it was into this narrow stream that Japhet steered our course.

As the sun rose, glowing high and higher from a cloudless heaven, so waxed the heat and never a breath of wind to temper its fierce beams, nor trees to shade us, for the river had broadened so vastly we seemed to be floating upon a great lake, whose sluggish waters served but to throw back the fierce sun glare so that my dazzled eyes could scarce endure to look on it.

And as we floated thus, seeming scarce to move betwixt the distant tree-girt banks and no sound but tinkle of water at the bows and slow rhythmic dip of the paddles, I began very heartily to wish myself safe on board the *Joyful Deliverance* and to yearn moreover for sight of Barnabas and old Lovepeace Farrance and divers others, but more especially for Ezekiel Penryn. And this set me to wondering how it befell that these same men that at first meeting I had deemed very hang-dog rogues should have so won upon my esteem that I could now think upon them so kindly to long thus for sight and sound of them.

From this I got me to thinking of the future and to shyly dreamful speculation of what it held in store for me—ay, and for this Japhet-man plying tireless paddle behind me and so near that I might touch him. And after some while, having him thus in my thoughts, I turned to steal a glance at him; and in this moment he ceased paddling and threw up his head with quick, stag-like motion, snuffing the air.

"What now?" I questioned, moved by the fierce alertness of him.

"Smoke!" he answered, "D'ye not smell it? Fire and destruction yonder,—sniff, lass, sniff!" And in a little, sure enough, I was aware of a faint, acrid reek, growing stronger, that chilled me with sudden dreadful apprehension, for I had smelled such once before; and then, ere I might voice my fear, Japhet stooped to throw back the blanket that covered his cherished musket and pistols, crying as he did so:

"Paddle, rogue Johnny, paddle,—for thy master the Devil's abroad...." Scarce had he uttered the words than as if in answer, faint, yet plain to be heard, a harsh voice screeched:

"The Innocent Blood! The Innocent Blood! 'od rot ye for damned murderer! The Fire Everlasting—to hell, to hell—to hell!"

CHAPTER XXXIX

TELLING HOW WE HAD NEWS OF CAPTAIN SNAITH

After some going, these placid waters narrowed suddenly to run furiously between rocky banks so stupendously high we rode in a dank gloom with naught to light us save a strip of sky very far above us, and this dismal place full of the never-ending, echoing riot of this rushing, angry flood. And now, seeing how our frail craft leapt, speeding betwixt these mighty walls that hemmed us in and so dreadfully near, fear seized me and I cowered down, staring upon this roaring flood and scowling rocks that threatened our destruction.

And in this dire moment what should I hear, loud above this tumult, but Japhet's voice singing his song of Yo-ho; the which so comforted me that I could have kissed him, and into my poor heart welled that which cast out my craven terror (or very nearly). And turning my head, I watched him as he sang, his eyes keen and watchful, his hands quick and sure upon the paddle, the which he dipped now and then to guide us through these perilous waters that swept in a great curve and whirled us out into peace and the blessed sunshine once more, where the river now ran singing between groves of graceful trees that drooped flowering branches to kiss, as it were, this pretty river. And beyond all this the first thing I saw was a patched and weather-beaten canoe and in it paddling towards us none other than Doctor Matthew Swayne, his parrot demurely perched upon his shoulder. No sooner was he up with us than Japhet questioned him, speaking the Indian dialect, in which same tongue Mr. Swayne answered. Now this set me a-wondering, so that, though understanding no word, I hearkened so keenly that I presently caught a name uttered more than once by Mr. Swayne, and being thus assured I instantly cut into their babblement.

"Japhet!" I demanded. "What is it he tells you of Captain Snaith?"

"Sink me, ma'm, but you've woundy long ears!" saith Japhet, opening his grey eyes at me. "Ay, like any hare's ears—"

Turning my back on him, I addressed myself to Mr. Swayne.

"Pray, sir," I questioned, "what is the news you bring concerning this Captain Snaith?"

"Evil, my child, very evil!" sighed the doctor. "This man o' blood hath burned Tuyayani village yonder, slaying many o' the folk, and is now marching 'gainst Pazaquil, that is a fair town, to slay more innocents, and all this for base gold!"

"And so it is," added Japhet, taking up his paddle, "that I am for Pazaquil also, to do my endeavour in defence o' these same innocents—"

"No, indeed!" said I. "You go but for vengeance on your Captain Snaith."

"This, too, ma'm, I'll not deny, for marching to join Snaith should be the black villain Rogerson."

"So then," cried I, bitterly reproachful, "you will peril my life again and thus wantonly to your own selfish, wicked purpose?"

"Not your life;" he answered sullenly. "You shall lie snug and safe enough and should aught befall me, the doctor here shall bring you safe to Bartlemy's Bay, 'tis but a scant five days' journey—"

"Oh!" I exclaimed angrily. "Have you not made me suffer dangers and hardships a-many?"

"Ay, somewhat, lass, somewhat!" he nodded. "But faith—you thrive on 'em, your body showeth fair and more shapely, your spirit e'en more courageous, though your shrewish temper seems nothing gentled, alas! Howbeit—and once for all, Ursula, the oath I swore over that sweet, murdered innocent is sacred to me and shall be fulfilled though I die for it! Now, friend Matthew—lead on!" cried he, ere I might retort. "Forward there, Johnny; give way and with a will."

Some half-hour's hard going brought us where we might behold the yet smoking ruins of this village of Tuyayani; and gazing upon this black and hideous desolation, Japhet ceased paddling and summoned Mr. Swayne beside us:

"Friend Matt," he questioned, "how far hence lieth Pazaquil town?"

"Twenty miles about, I reckon it by water, Brother, but scarce six by land."

"And what force hath the accursed Snaith beyond the forty odd men of his own ship's company?"

"Indians, Brother, of the Cymaroonia from the south, four to five hundred, my friend Guatamoxin estimates 'em, and all picked warriors."

"Hum!" quoth Japhet, rubbing his chin. "So many, Matt?"

"So saith Guatamoxin, and 'tis a wise cacique, Brother."

"Is there any word of a Captain Rogerson and his company?"

"Not that I've heard tell on, Brother."

"And how many fighting men shall Guatamoxin muster, think ye, 'twixt Tuyayani yonder and Pazaquil?"

"But scant two hundred, I fear, yet these mightily heartened at news o' you and eager for your coming."

"You proclaimed me then?"

"Ay, I did, as prince and blood brother to the Inca Yupanaqui."

"Then needs must I turn god awhile," quoth Japhet, and slipping off his doublet, rolled back his shirt, uncovering thus the sun symbol of royalty. Then catching up his paddle, he nodded to Mr. Swayne and on we went again. And surely never was such tortuous river as this (which I learned was named Coca) and beyond each bend such sudden vistas of wild and ever-changing beauty as no poor words of mine may tell; and so at last to a sweep of shore, deeply embayed and backed by groves of trees, rising gradually up and up, a mighty stretch of leafage, its divers greens splashed here and there by festoons of vivid flowers wondrous to behold.

Here Mr. Swayne ceased paddling, and, reaching into his canoe, took up a great horn and sounded thereon three or four deep bellowing notes, whereat and instantly amid this leafy wilderness, that had seemed so utterly deserted, was sudden stir, steel flickered, feathers nodded and out upon the shore stepped a tall man armed and decked for war.

"See Brother!" cried Mr. Swayne. "The Guatamoxin to greet you."

"And looks seasoned warrior, glory be!" quoth Japhet.

"Ay, friend Japhet, he's all o' that and cunning as he's brave."

As our canoe glided shoreward towards this solitary figure, Japhet raised one hand in salutation and I saw he had doffed his hat and upon his sunburned brow the golden circlet of kingship. Guatamoxin saw this too for, as our canoe touched shore, he sank upon one knee, calling aloud words that sounded like:

"*Huaycac Mayta!*" Whereupon forth of the groves stepped rank on rank of warriors, many of them wounded or showing grim marks of recent battle, and all their eyes on Japhet who, wading ashore, stood silent a moment, staring back on them; then, flashing out his sword, he began to speak them in loud, cheery voice, gesturing lightly with his glittering weapon. And as they hearkened, great wonder was it (thought I) to see how these warriors (and despite their late defeats) seemed to take fresh heart....

And after some while, weapons glittering and feathers astir all about us, I found myself walking with Japhet, my hand fast in his, my poor mind in such maze of anxiety for all that was, and growing fear of what was to be, that I began to question him breathlessly as to what he purposed to do with these fierce warriors, with himself and most especially me.

"Aha!" quoth he, casting an eye at me, "yourself as ever. Madam, it is for thy sweetly selfish self that, instead of speeding ahead of ambush and harrying Snaith and his rogues to the walls of Pazaquil, I lose precious time and tarry thus to ensure thy safety."

"Why, then," cried I, snatching my hand from him, "be off to your harrying! Go if you will—go and be killed—"

"Oh, Mrs. Bly, now shame on thee!" he mocked. "Is this thy tender, wifely regard?"

"Ah, go!" cried I, 'twixt passion of anger and tears, "since your revenge is dearer to you than I can ever be—go and let

them kill you ... but if they do ... Oh, Japhet, if you die, I will not live ... nay, I'll perish too and in this hateful country leave my poor bones with thine to—" Then he had swept me into his arms, holding me fast, breast to breast.

"Thy bones!" he murmured, with odd, quick laugh. "These so sweetly precious bones—" Suddenly he kissed me, holding me so strongly indeed that the pistols in his belt hurt my tenderness yet I endured unflinching, for now his lips were upon my hair, lips that whispered:

"Was it love peeped on me through thy tears, Ursula? Was it love cried in thy voice ... was it, girl?"

"And if so, Japhet," I whispered back, "if 'twas indeed so, would it ... ah, could it hold thee from thy vengeance?"

Japhet laughed harshly:

"Now out upon his hairy visage, our unshorn Matthew beckons us!" quoth he. "Come, lass!" So saying, he loosed me, tucked my hand within his arm and led me where Doctor Swayne and Guatamoxin the cacique stood waiting us.

"Looke, friend Matt," quoth he, clapping Mr. Swayne upon the back, "this lady, this spouse of mine, this right buxom Madam Bly, I set in charge o' thee awhile; look to her, Matt, look to her, for she indeed is all the wife I have, so shield her well."

"With my life, Brother! Ay, and the noble gentleman, Señor Don Ignazio Jesus de Campoflores, he shall be her safeguard also; and he hath power, Brother, for he is truly a great gentleman; come you and meet him." We had reached a stream-awinding 'twixt flowery banks and following this, we presently came upon a great house, or rather castle, builded of stone, its massive walls pierced by narrow, grated windows and a deep archway that led us into a wide courtyard all set with a glory of flowers 'mid which a fountain played, and with shady arcades around and airy chambers opening beyond. Scarce had we entered this right pleasant courtyard than what was my wonder to see a small though very stately gentleman approaching with divers servants and slaves behind him, a most unexpected and very resplendent personage, from the gems that glittered in his shoe buckles to the great flowing periwig, whose glossy curls framed and set off the high, proud dignity of his face.

Being come within a yard of us, he saluted us with such ceremony of bowing that (and despite my Indian garb) I responded with courtsey gracious as might be. Now, looking from this proud gentleman, in his splendour of rich laces and velvets, to Japhet, in his shabby way-worn garments, I read in the face of each that same proud dominance that spoke of birth and leadership.

"Sir," said the Don in very fair English, and reaching Japhet a small, white hand, "I give you welcome and Señor, beyond this, I can offer you fifty musketeers, men chosen and trained by myself and veterans all. Señora," said he, turning towards me with such tender smile that transfigured him quite, "gentle lady, your presence honours me and fills my cup with gratitude to overflowing for, by your valiant mercy, the dead is alive, the lost is found—hearken! One of these cometh to speak for himself."

As he uttered the words was clash of steel and I beheld Don Hilario, fully armed, who at sight of me came hasting to fall on his knees, kissing my hands in a youthful extravagance and naming me his good angel, his deliverer, etc., whereat I (seeing Japhet so glum) smiled on this comely young gentleman the more graciously.

Then Don Ignazio brought us within doors to a great and splendid chamber where stood servants and slaves, Indians and blackamoors, to serve us with all manner of luscious fruits and wines to our refreshment. And now young Hilario must needs tell Japhet how I had comforted and abetted him and his kinsman Tomasso in their escape; in the midst of which recital came servants bearing a rich armour, the which Don Ignazio begged Japhet to accept; but he demurring, the Don grew the more insistent, vowing it was proof against anything save cannon shot and that he must thus safeguard himself in duty to me, his lady wife. So the end of it was Japhet was buckled into this harness, all save his legs. Then these two courtly Spanish gentlemen bowed themselves out with their servants, leaving us alone to say our farewells. And a miserable business it was, so far as I was concerned, for besides being harassed by a natural anxiety, I was deeply hurt and grieved that he should thus desert me and to such purpose; therefore, 'stead of showing him the least wifely tenderness, I was angry and therefore ungracious.

"So, Japhet, you will actually leave me?"

"And in safe care, thank God!" he answered.

"Well, make this a salve to your conscience, sir. But I have a foreboding that in so wilfully going about to seek your own ends you are mocking God and wantonly tempting that merciful Providence hath brought us safe so far."

"Yet am I faithful to the oath I swore to that same God."

"Ay—your oath!" sighed I wearily. "Your oath that shall perchance bring on us, and especially me, a peril more dreadful than ever and prove our final ruin—"

"Sdeath, madam!" he exclaimed in sudden pet. "Is it thus you send me into action with such dismal prophecies o' woe and what not? Come now, Ursula, no more of these Jeremiads! Speak me cheerily; smile—faith, I'll e'en endure it if thou'lt—kiss me!"

"No!" quoth I angrily. "Since you thus peril the living to take vengeance for the dead, let the memory of the dead suffice you. For I know at last, beyond all doubt, you think more of your dead saint than the mere living woman who now bids you begone to your battles and revenges, since naught can let or stay you,—and oh, may God pity us!" So saying, I turned my back on him, hoping for some other word, a touch of his hand ... I heard him mutter fiercely, sigh deeply and go clashing away in his hateful armour, out into the courtyard where Don Hilario was mustering the files of his musketeers. So presently they marched forth, and I gazing after them, though blind with smarting tears.



CHAPTER XL

TELLETH HOW I RECEIVED A LETTER

So, once again, I must needs endure the harrowing torment of suspense, though Doctor Swayne and Don Ignazio bestirred themselves to divert me and distract my thoughts and I (for mere courtesy's sake) strove to respond as best I might. But as the laggard hours of this day dragged their weary length I could by no means endure to sit inactive so, with Doctor Swayne and my courteous host, I went a-walking.

I remember how (like the kindly gentlemen they were) they talked amain to hold my interest, telling me among other matters how marvellous fertile was this country where almost anything might be made to grow as tobacco plants, sugar cane and the like; and how wondrous rich with its mines of gold and silver and precious stones, and how the very rivers hereabout do carry a wealth of gold dust in their waters; and yet (thinks I) I would give it all for a strip of Downland in my dear Sussex by the sea. But as we went conversing thus, to us came speeding three liveried servants who, cringing to their knees, cried out in Spanish so woefully excited as filled me with sudden sick apprehension.

"Sir," I cried breathlessly. "Oh, Don Ignazio, what dreadful news do they bring?"

"Alas, madam," he answered, scowling on the three very fiercely, "these lazy dogs o' mine have kept so ill a watch that your noble husband's prisoner hath won free and stolen away—"

"Mr. John?" cried I. "Is he escaped? Oh, I am glad!"

"Glad?" repeated the Don, opening his fierce old eyes at me. "Glad, say you, madam? Howbeit, these lax rogues shall to the whipping post, all three." But this I would not hear of and, to the little Don's no small amazement, pleaded with him so vehemently on his servants' behalf that he could do no other than remit their punishment for my sake, as he told them, bidding the three thank me for his leniency; the which they did with an extreme of fervour and, at his gesture, betook themselves speedily away. And now Don Ignazio suggested running down the poor fugitive with his fierce hound dogs, to my horror, as I told him.

"But, madam," saith he, quite amazed, "what other do I keep hounds for but to hunt me rogues and runaways? And then, besides, what shall your noble husband say?"

"Oh, sir, in this he would agree with his wife," says I meekly.

Then cometh one Master Sebastiano, the major-domo and something pompous person, who, with many bows and flourishes, tells us there is a messenger come with a letter for the Señora.

"For me?" said I, all of a tremble. "Pray take me to him." So back went we to the flowery courtyard (that they call a patio) and here, standing beside the fountain, I beheld a tall, stately Indian, a seasoned warrior and comely, though stained by recent battle, who at sight of me, lifted one hand aloft in graceful salute and sank to a knee and, in this posture, drew a folded paper from the pouch at his girdle and placed it in my unsteady fingers; then smoothing out the paper, I read this:

Beyond Pazaquil.

MADAM,

This fair town is saved, I am well and the enemy in full retreat, therefore I rejoice and you also, I dare hope. But Captain Snaith, he that you wot of, hath 'scaped me in the rout, so far, so do I curse (and very heartily) since I must stand after him until I can bring him to final action and accomplish—what must be. Thus if I am delayed, prithee temper thy wifely impatience, thy so tender, loverlike yearnings to nestle thee in thy man's arms, and pray for the success, health, happiness and love of

THY JAPHET-MAN.

Post Scriptum. Don Hilario is well and hath done valiantly. Say unto the noble Don Ignazio how that his musketeers are instant to command, cool in action and do him exceeding credit.

Nota Bene. I hope to have finished Capt. S.—his business ere dawn. The bearer of this is one Caripuna and saved my life. Cherish him for this. He hath the English and can tell you of the fight, a pretty shrewd affair. He is also one in whom you may trust. I knew him when he was a very youth.

And now I march again to what must be, and, win or lose, my mind is serene and I content (almost) for wheresoever Fate lead me, I bear thee in my heart.

Now fare thee well until we meet again, as we surely must—here, or in the Infinite God knoweth where.

J.

Now as I read this letter, I began to wish with all my heart that I had kissed him when he, laughing as I knew to hide his diffidence, had so proffered; and long before I had read to the end, my cheeks were wet with tears; whereat the Don and Mr. Swayne, in their delicacy, would have freed me of their presence, but smiling through my tears, I beckoned them near and read them such parts of my letter as would interest them. Then turning where stood the tall Indian, I reached him my hand, the which he touched to his heart and brow.

"Caripuna," said I, pointing to the letter, "Captain Japhet writes here that you speak English."

"Yes, lady," he answered gravely; "speak very good, a little."

"Then first I thank you for bearing this letter."

"Lady, I bear it for him and for you—very fast."

"And now, Caripuna, I wish you to tell us of the battle, what you saw ... of Don Hilario and Captain Japhet."

"I see much! I tell much, lady!" Then while I sat beside the fountain, with the Don and Doctor Swayne on either side of me, the Indian Caripuna spake us, to the best of my memory, something on this wise:

"Battle—ah!" and he pointed to many tufts of silky hair adorning his buskins and the leggings that clothed his stalwart limbs. "I am warrior and have fought many fights but like this—ah, no! I see blood—ah, much! I shoot arrow, I see men die. I follow Guatamoxin and my Captain Japhet, for these mighty warriors and where they go, the fight deadly. And in the fiercest of the battle my friend the Japhet he cry out terribly—ah, he cry!"

"And what," I questioned, "what did he cry?"

"Lady, he make a fierce battle—ah! And he shout 'What—Snaith!' he cry, 'Ho, Roger Snaith, stand and fight!' he cry."

"Then you saw this Captain Snaith—"

"Yea, lady, a mighty man and fierce—ah! Yea, fierce as my Captain Japhet."

"And did they—fight?"

"No, no—the battle so fierce and so many, and Snaith he keep away ... no like my Japhet. And then, the muskets shoot them one way and warriors from Pazaquil charge them the other way, so very many, and the Cymaroon and the white men, what left of them, they run. Battle finish. Ah!"

"And your prisoners?" enquired Doctor Swayne, reaching instinctively for the pouch of surgical instruments at his girdle, "what o' your prisoners?"

"No prisoners!" answered Caripuna. "Kill all dead!"

"Ah, barbarity!" sighed the doctor.

"Nay, my friend," answered Don Ignazio. "It is a sound principle and practical common sense in such wars as we must fight."

"So is war accursed and damnable, Brother."

"And what," said I, rising, "what of Captain Japhet and Don Hilario?"

"When battle end, lady, Captain be very weary. He sit, he write letter. He call me his friend, he say give this into lady her own pretty hand. Then he load pistols, he call to Guatamoxin and he go hunting white men and their Captain Snaith. Don Hilario wish to go too, but my Japhet he say no; he waste no more of the Don's musketeers. Then he shake hand and —go."

"And when will he come back, Caripuna?"

"Ah, lady, Caripuna wise, but not know this."

"Well, then," said I, mighty determined, "if he be not come safe hither to-morrow, then you and I, Caripuna, will go seek him."

"Caripuna go with lady, he know the forest, he read the sign, he find his Captain Japhet dead or alive, he bring lady safe or him die too. Ah!"

Sunset came at last with sudden night (as is Nature's way in these hot latitudes) and I mighty glad to be rid of this most wearisome day. But this night, though I knew again the sweet luxury of linen sheets and a feather bed in chamber very sumptuous and airy, kind slumber refused me its solace. Therefore, instead of sitting up to gloat upon my treasure of jewels or even so much as thinking of them, I took Japhet's letter, this the first he had ever writ me, and read it through again word by word. Then, refolding it carefully, I thrust it into my bag of gems, that I bore ever upon my breast, and with it thus against my heart contrived, after some while, to fall asleep.

CHAPTER XLI

WHICH IS CHAPTER SHOULD HAVE BEEN LONGER

But in my slumber something disturbed me and, sighing drowsily, I awoke and the moon's radiance very vivid about me, making all things bright; and what was my wonder to see a great scarlet blossom upon the pillow beside me. I was staring on this in no little wonderment when came another to fall softly upon my bosom and, sitting up in bed, the wonder was instantly explained; for there upon the floor beside my bed, wrapped in his cloak and apparently asleep, lay Japhet. Now to see him thus unexpectedly (and I all bemused with sleep) was such joyous relief that I came very near leaping from the sheets to welcome him, but checked the impulse and hugging the bedclothes about me, laughed at him instead, for what must the wretch do but snore at me as he were sound asleep. And when I had laughed and he had affected to snore thus a while, he turned his head to cock a bright eye at me over his shoulder. Then, casting off his cloak, he sat up cross-legged, shaking his head as in rebuke, though his lips quirked at me.

"Fie, ma'm—now fie for shame!" quoth he. "How can you so sit and laugh so shameless? And at such hour! And in thy bed! And a man beside thee! Though, being merely poor Japhet—on the floor! Like the meekly humble soul he is."

"But how," said I, "pray why are you here, my noble lord?"

"Aha!" he jeered. "Coy Madam Prudery, d'ye shrink and cower at sight of a man and him thy meek and modest spouse? Will ye blush, ma'm and—"

"Fiddle-de-dee!" I retorted. "I am neither coy nor a prude, sir, and I do not blush."

"Then shame on thee, woman! That I should be here in fair lady's bedchamber and she, ye gods, my wife, and you so boldfaced crouching there, a very dragon o' virtue (swathed in bedclothes to be sure),—a sweetly frightful Gorgon. I had rather you had blushed and flushed and what not. For hither crept I on soundless feet and watched thee glowing in the sweet beatitude o' sleep, all maiden innocence and seeming tenderness—"

"Nay, Japhet," said I, leaning down towards him from my warm nest, "'tis you have been tender of me, for until now you have so respected my slumbers that I have respected your gentler manhood the more; then pray why have you stolen thus upon me to-night?"

"Madam, to save thy fair countenance and my own poor visage, to prevent a wagging o' tongues. In fine, for the following cogent reasons, to wit: Hither returning with young Hilario some hours since, forth comes the Don, our noble host, to welcome us; he wines us, sups us and, scarce waiting for our tale o' victory, tells me how my lady wife hath been passioning for me all day long, and straightway, like the gallant ancient he is, ushers me speedily upstairs to my wife's eager arms, as he supposes, God bless him! And so, madam, being thine own poor Japhet, here sit I all meekness upon the floor!"

"Oh!" said I.

"Ah!" sighed he, so dolefully that I looked at him and meeting his eyes, flushed instantly like any fool, whereat he fell laughing at me.

"Well, and why," I demanded, "why must you throw flowers at me?"

"Well," he answered, as pondering the question, "there was naught else to throw at thee—save a chair or so."

"Why did you wake me, Japhet?"

"For mere company's sake!"

"Oh!" said I again, and:

"Ah!" sighed he.

"Did the Don tell you Mr. John had escaped?"

"He did."

"Well—what say you?"

"Zounds! What should I say o' the poor fool knave?"

"Well, I'm vastly glad of it!" quoth I.

"Sayst thou, lass, and wherefore?"

"I shall sleep sweeter of a night."

"Being alone with me, lass?"

"Yes, Japhet."

"Hum!" quoth he and frowned up at the gilded ceiling.

"How will he fare, think you—Mr. John?"

"Well, he'll either wander i' the forests till he starve to death like a fool, with plenty around him, or be killed by wild beasts, slain by roving Indians or perish in some swamp or river; yet, if he have any wit, he will make for the coast, follow it and be retaken by our messmates o' the *Deliverance*."

"Well, Japhet," said I, leaning down to him again, "if he have such wit, as I think he hath, if you should indeed find him prisoned again on the *Deliverance*, will you ... ah, would you strive to forgive him or—or, Japhet," sighed I, reaching forth my hand to him in the fervour of my pleading, "will you promise me now for your own sake, for my sake and ... the future—wilt pledge me to at least forgo thy vengeance on him;—wilt promise me this, Japhet?"

For a long moment he sat gazing up at me beneath slow-knitting brows: and then as I leaned thus waiting his answer, my heart beating in strange, wild fashion, my hand reached out to touch his head and draw him near, in this tremulous never-to-be-forgotten moment—he yawned, stretched his arms and rose.

"Heigho!" quoth he. "Soon 'twill be dawn and I must sleep. But first, as to forgiving rogue Johnny—no! Not for my sake, thy sake, nor all the witching, warm enticement of thee; so cover thyself and tempt me no more—"

"Tempt thee?" I gasped, well-nigh weeping at this cruel taunt. "How can you, how dare you think such baseness of me? 'Tis wicked, hateful lie, as well you know, and so are you hateful liar, a wantonly wicked, hateful, odious, beastly fellow."

"Avast, lass, avast! Stint thy clack, a mercy's sake, for I'm plaguey weary and must sleep."

"Then sleep!" said I scornfully. "Get you to farthest corner out of my sight and trouble me no more."

"Never doubt it!" he retorted. "And yet who knows? I may walk in my sleep. So take my sword and should I so, pink me gently into wakefulness." So saying, he placed the sword to my hand, whereat I instantly turned my back on him.

"And now good night to thee, sweet Madam Spitfire," sighs he very mournfully, "it grieveth thy Japhet to see thee waste thy sweet and luscious blandishments to none effect. Good night, sweet soul."

CHAPTER XLII

HOW WE DISCOURSED BY THE WAY

All the morning Japhet had been busied with Doctor Swayne, tending the many wounded that had come in from yesterday's fierce battle. Thus it was high noon and the day very hot when our long piragua was launched and we, with many expressions of our gratitude, took leave of our hospitable and very courtly host.

"*Par Sant Iago!*" said he, shaking his white head over us very ruefully, "I grieve to see you go. We need such hardy gentlemen as yourself, *El Capitan*, and such beauty as your lady wife should make this fair world fairer."

"To-morrow," quoth Doctor Swayne scratching the bright, down-bent head of the parrot on his shoulder, "to-morrow I might company with thee, Brother, for so soon as I may leave my cases here, I am for the folk of Chipayo. Tarry then until to-morrow."

"I thank you both—and all," answered Japhet, lifting his long musket to his shoulder, "but we've reason for speed. And so, gentlemen, kind friends, God be with you and fare ye well."

So we embarked and our graceful canoe bore us smoothly away from these kind friends and secure harbourage to those hateful sufferings and dire perils, the black menace of which had troubled my consciousness with vague terrors, as I have already set down.

Now after we had paddled some way in silence (for Japhet had showed me how with twist of blade to keep a straight course), I began to question him thus:

I: Japhet, pray why such haste to be gone?

HE: For your sake.

I: How so?

HE: Well, for one thing, I would know you safe aboard ship.

I: And then what?

HE: Then, for another thing, ma'm, there be black villains alive, and apt for all manner of evil, that should be dead and quite beyond it.

I: Which black villains and what?

HE: Snaith! He escaped me, devil burn him!

I: Well, how since he hath eluded you—how now, what shall you do?

HE: (*Sullenly*) Faith, need you ask?

I: (*Ceasing to paddle*) Meaning you will pursue him, Japhet?

HE: Ay, to be sure. And after him, Rogerson, since I've word he's hereabout. And if you would paddle, ma'm, prithe paddle.

But instead of so doing, I folded my nerveless hands and bowed my head in despair of this so terribly vindictive man. And so went we mile after mile without speaking another word. At last I said suddenly, putting my thoughts into words:

"You must have loved her very greatly, the poor creature that—killed herself."

"Ay," he answered, "I did indeed!"

"And she so different to—myself!"

"As day to night, Ursula. She was so dark, so sweetly soft—all tender shy gentleness, and you—"

"And I myself," cried I, "am all red-haired ferocity; oh, say it, say it!"

"Nay," he answered. "I could not have put it so aptly. 'All red-haired ferocity!' How true, how very, very true."

Here again was silence, mile after mile, until we came where a stream curved away on our left hand, a winding stream

bowered in lofty trees very green and shady and cool; and into this we turned. And now, ceasing to paddle, Japhet set fingers to mouth and whistled shrill and loud and thereafter sat waiting, until round a bend shot a canoe at prodigious speed, and in it none other than the Indian Caripuna, who, drifting alongside, saluted us in his stately fashion and began talking with Japhet in his own musical language. For some while they conversed thus very earnestly then, lifting their hands to each other, Japhet took up his paddle and Caripuna shot away from us at the same rapid pace. After he had paddled some distance, saith Japhet:

"Are you for speech again, ma'm?"

"As you will," sighed I.

"Then be so good to say how you purpose to entreat and use poor meek Japhet when you shall come aboardship?"

"This, sir, shall depend wholly on Japhet."

"How so, ma'm?"

"Whether he be truly meek and humble gentleman or fierce and arrogant wretch as I prove him now."

"Alack, this same poor wretch may not change his nature."

"Then I'll none of him."

"Ay, but how of this woeful marriage?"

"I'll to England and take out bill of divorcement, or better, proceed against him for abduction."

"Hum!" quoth he.

"Pray," I enquired, "wherefore hath Caripuna followed us and why must you talk Indian?"

"All to good purpose, ma'm. But talking of ourselves,—let us suppose that by some stupendous miracle, some tremendous convulsion of cosmos, Japhet should indeed be changed and meekly say to thee: 'Ursula, since it is thy will, so will I forgive all my enemies (ay, and thy enemies), and forgetting all past wrongs done to myself (ay, and thyself), vow to live henceforth but to pleasure thee and do thy behests obedient to thee in all things'—how then?"

"Then I should despise him!" said I.

"Ay!" nodded Japhet. "And I too!"

"But," I went on, turning that I might see him, "if and by no stupendous miracle save that of love, this same poor wretch became such very man that with his arms about me he should say; 'Woman, hast filled my heart so full of love no room is there for other passions, so, for thy sake, I'll waste no more thought on what is past, but with thee and for thee live to future purpose!' Such, man Japhet, I could truly honour and—I believe—love. So his way should be my way, his will mine, and I his for ever. Yea, indeed I might truly love such a man, Japhet."

"And small wonder!" he nodded. "For such man is no man at all but mere thing of your fancy, a bodyless vision conjured of your own imagining. Thus to love such were no more than to love yourself—"

"Ah, would you mock me?" cried I despairingly.

"God forbid!" he answered, very solemnly. "But if, 'stead of worshipping your own dream, you could love our Japhet with all his failings, merely for what he is and all that he is not, love him beyond all sense and reason and despite your niminy-piminy self, love him purely because love him you must, why then, ma'm, this I dare think were love indeed! And how saith your ladyship?"

But instead of answering I was silent, since well knew I how that love is indeed beyond all cool reason and may become a very tyrant, bending us to his imperious will in despite of our better judgment; so now, feeling Japhet's eyes on me, I averted my head lest he might read all this in my face.

And it was in this moment of all others that calamity rushed upon us as, sudden and faint with distance, yet plain to hear

in this hot noontide stillness, rose that long-drawn, high-pitched quavering scream that is the Indian battle cry and the which surely no one may hear unmoved; so that I turned to question Japhet, but caught my breath and recoiled to see his features all convulsed and dreadfully transfigured.

"Japhet ... oh, my dear," I gasped; "what is it—?"

But all he said, and this 'twixt shut teeth, was:

"Paddle!"

CHAPTER XLIII

TELLETH HOW, LIKE POOR HUNTED CREATURES, WE TOOK TO THE WILDS

I felt our long canoe leap beneath the powerful strokes of Japhet's paddle and plied my own strongly as I might and keeping time with his. And thus went we at our best speed, dip and sweep, dip and sweep, through the bubbling waters and with no respite, until my arms and shoulders began to ache with the unaccustomed strain. On thus and on, until my breath grew short and my heart so athrob with ceaseless effort that I thought I could hear the heavy pounding of it; but after some while, this sound becoming louder I knew it could not be my poor heart and my wonder grew until, all at once, the knowledge rushed upon me that this was the beat and thrash of paddles in fierce pursuit and venturing to glance over my shoulder, fear seized me, for I saw afar three canoes full of men whose paddles flashed.

But even as I glanced at our pursuers thus fearfully, from the foremost canoe one hailed in rich clear voice:

"Japhet—ahoy! Stand by, messmate; bring to and let's alongside!"

Now this voice sounded so friendly and joyful that instinctively I ceased my violent efforts and glancing at Japhet's set, grim face:

"Who?" gasped I, "who calls?"

"Snaith!" Now this name, and Japhet's terrible look as he spake it, renewed my terrors to such degree that I plied my paddle more desperately than ever, dip and sweep, dip and sweep,—despite the growing agony of my aching limbs, on and on until the bright, speeding waters, the swift, gliding banks—nay, the very firmament itself—seemed reeling upon my blurred and failing sight, and I might scarce hold the paddle; then as I laboured thus, scarce conscious that I did so, came Japhet's voice to cheer me:

"Easy, my hearty ... yonder is the river at last.... What, Ursula, sweet soul, art done then?... Now, God love thy valiant heart. Rest thee ... lie down—so, whiles I try a shot at them."

Now as I lay panting and all foredone, I yet found strength to turn me and watch Japhet who, outstretched beyond me, was sighting his long musket against the leading canoe, the which to my despair was come much nearer: For some while Japhet dwelt upon his aim; then I started to the sudden roar of his piece and, through the billowing smoke, saw this leading canoe swerve suddenly from its course, blocking the other two in the narrow waterway, heard fierce shouts and cries and then that same clear voice in loud command:

"No shooting, lads. I want the lady unspoiled—"

At this I cowered instinctively and as I lay thus reached out to touch Japhet's foot, murmuring his name. But scarce heeding me, he seized his paddle and once more we shot forward, I watching that huddle of canoes until they were hid behind a sudden jut of land as we turned out of that narrow stream into a wide river. Having by now recovered my breath, I too laboured amain to urge us away from the oncoming menace behind, that filled me with a sick horror beyond all words to describe, but that yet goaded me to a very agony of wild and desperate effort, until I heard again the comfort of Japhet's voice, breathless to be sure, but so assured, so cheery and untroubled that (as it were) it stemmed the mad torrent of my fears:

"Easy, comrade—easy, sweet lass! A stern chase is ever a long one so ... easy it is, sweetheart."

Dip and sweep—dip and sweep—on and on, and still no sign of our pursuers, so that my courage returned somewhat and I had even turned my head once or twice to glance back and smile on Japhet—when came disaster; for in full career, our light canoe smote upon some unseen obstacle, almost turned over, righted itself and swept on, but with water pouring in upon us through a rent in her frail prow.

"What—is she badly stove?" panted Japhet. "Ay—I see! Aft, lass, come you aft—near to me and lift her bow." But though my added weight did cause the forepart to rise, checking somewhat the inrush of water, yet by the look on Japhet's face I knew our plight was become quite desperate as, saying no word, he swung our stricken craft shorewards, paddling amain as did I also, until I grew suddenly sick and weak, as came a distant roar of fierce voices in hoarse, mocking triumph; and in this moment, picturing Japhet's certain death and the unspeakable abominations I must endure, I let fall

my useless paddle and was ready to die. But even now our long canoe, driven by Japhet's powerful arms, plunged ashore, running its prow high and dry and fast aground.

"Jump, Ursula!" he cried. Now scarce had I obeyed than he hands me first his musket, then his pistols, and after these tossed on land blankets, a knapsack and divers other things, and I all the while imploring him to hasten. Yet even so he must pause to belt on his sword and look back at the canoes that seemed coming at such speed and I crying on him in very agony of impatience to be gone. But when he stood beside me, he must stay to sling his musket about him, to toss me the two blankets and snatch up the knapsack.

Then nodding at me, his grey eyes very bright, his smiling lips very grim:

"Come, my Ursula," says he, "it's woodcraft now, with stout hearts and nimble legs, and praise God thine is truly valiant heart as I ha' proved; and as for thy precious, sweet legs—"

"Oh, Japhet, let us run."

"No, no, lass. Take your time, follow me, tread where I tread and softly as maybe. No crack o' twig, sweetheart; no rustle o' leaves if possible."

And so, with terror of death and unspeakable shame behind me and unknown perils before, I followed this Japhet into the wilderness, resolved henceforth to live for him or die with him as Providence in its wisdom should decree.

CHAPTER XLIV

TELLETH HOW I MADE COMPACT TO KILL MYSELF AND WHEREFORE

Now this part of my narrative is like to prove a hard matter to set down as I would, for I went in such marvellous perturbation of spirits, my brain so numbed by horror and sick despair, that I can scarce endure to think on even now.

I remember struggling upwards from the river, through a trackless wild, dense with vegetation and trees great and little but all so tangled and knit together by clambering vines that our going was painfully slow, and more than once Japhet must pause to cut us a passage with his sword; the which frequent delays set me in a very fever of impatience and shivering panic, lest our pursuers espy the flash of his long blade or hear its ponderous strokes, as I told him.

"Well, let 'em—ay, let 'em!" quoth he, cutting away right heartily.

"But you said we must make no sound."

"Ay, I did; but d' ye see, the time for silence is not yet. Yonder to starboard of us (that is to our right, sweet soul) runneth a freshet, a rill excellent to our purpose."

"I see naught of it, Japhet."

"Yet 'tis there, sweetheart. I caught the merry sparkle of it ere I beached the canoe. So give thanks therefor, since this same rill shall prove our very good friend."

"How so?" I questioned, straining my ears for the dread sound of pursuit.

"Come you and see, and pluck up thy dear heart," said he, whereat I contrived to smile on him. Then on and up we went, forcing our way through these close, leafy tangles until we came suddenly on a little torrent that leapt, with pretty babblement, to join the great smooth-flowing, silent river below. And now he points me up and along this little riotous stream to where, pretty far upon the height above us, stood a great tree plain to see by reason of its size and spread of branches.

"There's for thee, Ursula," says he cheerily. "Get you into this stream and wade to yonder tree and there wait thy Japhet."

"Ay, but why must you leave me?" I questioned anxiously. "What will you do?"

"Outmatch brute villainy with guile, lass. I ha'n't fought and hunted with Indians without learning me some o' their craft. So whiles you wade in the stream, leaving no trace, I'll set Snaith and his rogues such trail as babe might follow. So get thee to the tree and there abide my coming." Saying which, he turned and vanished and (to my wonder) with scarce a sound. Forthwith I began to wade up this stream, forcing my way against its bubbling rush, and this so laborious that often I must pause for rest and, more than once, came nigh falling by reason of its strength and the precarious foothold; thus when at last I reached the great tree, glad was I to sink down in its grateful shade.

From this eminence I could see a wide stretch of the river, yet look how I would, nowhere could I see aught of the canoes or Captain Snaith's company, so that I guessed they must be come inshore; and to think how they should be thus stealing upon us, so silently and all unseen, waked in me such fearful trepidation that the deadly stillness of the myriad leaves around me, the brooding silence of this vast wilderness, became a menace that appalled me and I yearned amain for Japhet.

Now as I crouched thus, praying fervently in my soul and watching for Japhet, this ominous silence was shattered by the sudden report of a musket and this answered very presently by a dreadful hoarse screaming that sank to a groan lost in uproar of voices in question and answer, thin with distance yet plain in the stillness.

"Who was yon?"

"Pedro the Portingale."

"Dead—eh?"

"Ay, Cap'n, a harrer through the eye! 'Twas yon same cursed Indian."

"Did ye get him, Joe?"

"No, sir,—got ashore, 'e have."

"Then ashore it is, lads, and after him."

Up leapt I, like a wild thing eager to flee, yet, minding how Japhet had bid me wait, I checked and cowered down among the great gnarled roots of this tree, hiding myself well as I might. Now as I crouched thus in my misery, a shadow fell athwart my vision and glancing up fearfully, I saw Japhet smiling down on me and this sudden sight of him such joy that up I sprang to meet him and so blindly that I stumbled and should have fallen but for his ever-ready arms; and as I stood thus, clasped and clasping, my cheek pillowed against his worn jerkin, I could have wept for pure joy and relief.

"Oh, Japhet," I gasped, "you are so sudden! You came so silently—"

"Ay, I did," he answered gently, "for here is the time for silence awhile." And now as I clung to him, he falls to stroking my hair, comforting me as I had been a child.

"There, there, my dear!" he murmured. "Why so fearful? This is not like our proud and valiant Ursula."

"Oh, Japhet," I murmured, pressing myself closer against him, "it is horror for that man."

"Snaith?" said he and spat. "Take comfort my dear; have faith in thy God, thyself and thy Japhet, for if there be any justice in earth or heaven, Snaith shall make his final exit sudden and soon ... and yet not too suddenly an' I may so contrive it."

"Come, Japhet, let's away—let us run."

"Nay, my dear," he answered, seating himself and drawing me beside him, "let Snaith and his rogues do the running whiles we take our ease awhile. I've set 'em a trail they shall not miss—aha, yonder they give tongue, baying to it like very dogs—hark to 'em!" And even as he spoke, from the leafy distances below us rose sudden triumphant shouts and hallooing.

"What, Jerry! Ho, Tom! Cap'n ahoy! Here lays our course, mates; here be their trail!" And to my joy as I listened, scarce breathing, these voices drew away, growing ever fainter.

"And now," cried I, making to rise, "let us speed away in the opposite direction."

"Why, so we will," said he, gently restraining me, "we do but wait for Caripuna."

"Oh!" said I, glancing about expectantly, "will he go with us, then?"

"Ay, he will indeed, Ursula, and 'tis a faithful, noble heart and notable warrior. He hath to-day accounted for two of Snaith's company with his arrows and I one, which leaveth no more than fifteen all told."

"So many!" I gasped.

"Yet so few, considering they marched against Pazaquil forty odd strong, my dear. And Ursula, here's news for thee," quoth he, viewing me grimly askance, "of their company is my villain cousin, our Johnny!"

"Oh, art sure, Japhet?"

"Beyond doubt."

"Is the poor man their prisoner?"

"Not he. I watched them come ashore and lay so close I heard them salute him as 'my lord' and saw he went armed. Well, like will to like, a rogue to roguery and so be damned to him—saving your sweet presence."

"And so," said I, after a while and mighty doleful, "you are two men against fifteen."

"Well, and what then, comrade?"

"Oh, let us away, for pity's sake, for if they should ever come up with us, our case were surely hopeless."

"But, sweet soul, they shall not come up with us, for we shall be following on their heels—"

"Following them?" I gasped.

"Ay, we shall indeed," he nodded, "every step—we hunt our hunters, Caripuna and I."

"How then," cried I, well-nigh beside myself with fearful amazement, "what folly ... what madness is this?"

"A folly so wise and madness so sane as shall be our salvation, I pray God."

"Talk not of God," quoth I, in bitter reproach, "for you do but risk our lives thus wantonly that you may contrive to meet and slay your enemy—"

"Amen!" said he, looking at me so smugly that I could have struck him but that he caught my clenched hand suddenly and kissed it.

"Fie now," said he, opening out my unwilling fingers one by one, "abate thy shrewish humours, sweet, gentle ma'm, and suffer poor Japhet to explain. First, then; when dogs or worse pursue, they keep their eyes before 'em; thus we travelling behind shall go unseen, the which is reason, I think ma'm?"

"No," I retorted. "Reason bids us turn about and flee the opposite way."

"But the opposite way is west, ma'm, and Bartlemy's Bay lieth due nor'-east, as doth the River of Amazons, and 'tis thither Snaith marches, as I chance to know, to meet with his comrade—"

"Then," said I, "let us turn north or south—anywhere but in yon hateful man's neighbourhood."

"Nay, prithee ha' patience and hear me out."

"Oh," quoth I, "say what you will, for I know you are determined to do as you will."

"Ay, I am," he answered, "and for the following notable good reasons, to wit:"

"Because," I cried angrily, "you are obstinate, a stiff-necked, obdurate, headstrong, contumacious wretch!"

"Yet humbly at your ladyship's service."

"No," I retorted bitterly, "you serve only yourself. And in your wicked pride dare to think two men may withstand fifteen."

"Ay, I do so," he answered, "for these two men are very able at their weapons, skilled in forestry and the crafts and cunning of Indian warfare, whereas these fifteen, though bold enough aboardship, are no more than so many fools here in the wilderness, and moreover, being full of sailorly superstitions, very apt to sudden affrights and dread of the unknown. And we shall play on these fears; ay, ma'm, we'll plague 'em, I'll warrant me! We'll so harass the rogues, smiting 'em unseen with arrow and bullet, they shall believe us, 'stead of two men, a legion of very devils. For, my dear, attack is ever the best defence."

"And while this is a-doing, I pray you what of me?"

"You shall be safe enough, child. Indeed, 'tis you are my only and abiding anxiety, though a mighty precious one. But for care of you, Caripuna and I might drive yon rogues and slaughter 'em like so many sheep."

Now here, finding me silent, he begins humming very cheerily (and myself nigh sick with fearful anxiety) so that, seeing him thus so serenely assured, I began to cast about how I might shake his prideful self-confidence. So I shuddered violently and sighed until, forgetting his humming, he turned to view me with no little uneasiness, and ask what troubled me.

"Oh, Japhet," I answered, bowing my head between my hands, "it were strangely terrible if, despite all your cunning

stratagems and care of me, I should end by killing myself, as did your poor Spanish lady and for the same ... shameful reason—"

Now this indeed roused him at last, though far beyond my expectation, for even as I spoke, he leapt afoot as I had stabbed him and turned on me in such wild fury of anger as amazed me.

"God's death!" cried he in terrible, choking voice. "Never say it ... never think such vile thing..." Then he stood dumb, as if further speech were beyond him, his eyes blazing at me from a face dreadfully convulsed as by some sharp spasm; but while I yet viewed him aghast, he turned his back on me and stood beside the little torrent, staring down into its tumultuous waters, his shoulders bowed and head adroop in posture very strangely humble in such as he.

"And so, Japhet," said I, finding him thus mute, "you shall give me one of the little pistols, after all, that I may bear it hidden and yet ready."

"To ... kill yourself?" says he in the same choked voice.

"Yes," I answered. "Yes!"

"Could you, Ursula? You are so young and so very—English."

"I am a woman!" cried I. "And though the thought of such death terrifies me now, there are abominations may make death kindly welcome, ay, a strong friend to lift me from all evil, I humbly pray—up to God. So give me the pistol, for to know I may summon this friend when all else fails. Oh, this shall make me your less fearful companion! Prithee give me the pistol, Japhet."

Then all in a moment he had turned and was upon his knees before me, his poor face all wet with tears and so changed it shocked me beyond words, so that I reached out my hands and laid them upon his bowed shoulders.

"Oh, Ursula," he gasped in broken whisper, "thou lovely thing ... thou sweet child ... dear, valiant woman, you'll mind as a boy I could pray, but ... my life hath been so hard ... and when she died in such terrible fashion, I cursed God, in my madness that He had not spared her sweet body such evil ... and since then I have not troubled the Almighty with my prayers.... But here and now I do pray again to God to make me strong and wise to thy safety.... To keep thee thine own sweet self ... to ward thee from such foul wrong as she knew ... ah, God, not again ... not this woman also, that is more than life to me ... not again..."

Now, as he cried thus in a sort of frenzy, I drew him to me, pillowing his head upon my bosom and, feeling how his stalwart frame shook and quivered, I kissed his tear-wet cheek, murmuring I know not what to comfort him.

"Here upon thy heart at last!" says he, after some while and nestling closer.

"As you might have been ere now, but for your arrogant pridefulness and stubborn vengeful ferocity, Japhet."

"Lord love me!" he murmured. "And wilt argue with me—even here?"

"And why not?" I retorted. "Vengeance destroyeth itself—it is not for us poor humans, for remember how it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, saith the Lord—'"

"Ay, but," he answered, "you shall read also how Christ said He brought not peace but a sword, and how he belaboured the money changers that desecrated the Temple. Here's refutation beyond argument! And shall not a man smite the ravening beast that outrages Innocence? Ay, by heaven, that will I."

At this I loosed my arms from him, whereupon he clasped me in his, and nestling his head against me murmured:

"Loose not thy poor Japhet yet awhile, for his childish tears are scarce dried—"

"These were not childish tears!" says I indignantly.

"No, God love thee!" he murmured, kissing my throat. "These were tears wrung from the very heart o' me. I marvel they were not blood. But, Ursula, ma'm, in this my dark, sweet hour, thy tender arms, thy lips, though speechless, spake me a wondrous message; thy heart is whispering it even now,—it hath a deep, strong beat, this same heart; shall it ever speak me so again, I wonder, in lovelier hour holier even than this, or—" The murmurous voice checked suddenly as from

remote distances broke a wild uproar of shouting crowned in rolling volley of musketry. Japhet was afoot and had caught up his musket all in a moment.

"Oh, why are they shouting?" cried I, leaping to clasp his arm. "What can it mean?"

"One of two things," he answered, glancing at the priming of his musket. "Prithee loose my arm for I—"

As he spoke, there rose that thrill wavering scream, whereat Japhet grounded his long weapon and nodded.

"Caripuna!" said he and whistled a soft, babbling note, very birdlike, that was presently taken up and answered; and after some while the undergrowth on the opposite side of the stream parted with scarce a rustle and the Indian stood to salute us with his long bow; him Japhet questioned briefly in his own tongue, whereat Caripuna, grim-smiling, answered as briefly, holding up one sinewy finger and bowing his sleek head that was adorned with but a single feather.

"Oh, pray speak English," said I impatiently. "What doth he tell you, Japhet?"

"That the fifteen are now fourteen."

"Ah—very good!" quoth Caripuna, showing me his bow that was all garnished with gold wire and tufts of hair mighty handsome. "Caripuna, he shoot. Death on arrow—ah!" And he pointed to a hairy something adangle at his beaded girdle, perceiving which I recoiled in horror, for this thing dripped horridly; and now, noting again all those tufts of hair that decked his lithe shapeliness from thigh to ankle, I grew faint.

"Nay, child," said Japhet, setting his arm about me, "he doeth but after the manner of his nation. So if you must look on him, regard his face, for 'tis right comely and what's more, honest and true, lass. Now come, sweet comrade, let us march." So on went we side by side, the stately Indian stalking noiseless before.



CHAPTER XLV

TELLETH HOW MY MOST DREADFUL APPREHENSIONS WERE REALIZED

With nightfall we were high above the leafage and the sun's last beam showed we were traversing a narrow tableland or ridge that trended steeply down and down upon our left to the broad river, vague with distance; and to our right swept away league upon league of dark forest. All about us as we went showed strange great rocks upstarting from the earth but of such unlovely shapes, so writhen and contorted, as troubled me with a vague terror.

Then came sudden night and so black dark that I might scarce see my way, and these hideous rocks, as it were, pressing in upon me and looming yet more dreadful in the pitchy gloom, so that at last being unable to endure, I cried on Japhet and made pretence to stumble that he might aid me; the which he did and very tenderly, bidding me take his arm, and asking what ailed me, whereto I answered:

"It is so hateful dark and you so silent, and I'm aweary and hungry and terrified, and you never speak to me."

"Yet was I thinking of thee, girl."

"Kindly, Japhet?"

"I was thinking how these hardships and perils you have endured have ennobled and made you lovelier in spirit and handsomer of body—ay thou'rt changed, lass."

"Well, pray go on, Japhet. How other am I changed?"

"You show more true woman than finical fine madam these days, you are more tender, gentler—despite your fiery hair. Oh, faith, this hath been a wondrous experience, this journey together."

"You speak as it were over."

"Ay," he sighed, "it will be ended very soon; another three or four days and we should be aboard the *Deliverance*,—and I for one shall be sadly sorry."

"So shall not I," said I fervently.

"And yet," quoth he wistfully, "'tis in my mind you shall come to yearn for these days perchance, as I shall, most surely, for never had man such comrade as thyself, nor one more valiant."

"Yet, Japhet, here am I all atremble, like veriest coward."

"Hum!" quoth he, giving my arm a squeeze. "You trembled at me once, my dear."

"Ay, I did, for you shamed and terrified me."

"Lord," sighed he. "How woundily you misjudged your humble, gentle Japhet!"

"Because he was nowise humble or gentle."

"Howbeit you shall never tremble at him again, sweet soul."

"No," I answered reproachfully, "I must needs tremble *for* him nowadays, it seems." Here, ere he might answer, Caripuna called to us and approaching with his noiseless step, pointed down into the vasty glooms upon our left; and looking whither he directed, I saw, far below us in this dark immensity, a red spark that winked upon us from the distance; and guessing what this must be, I shivered and clung the faster to Japhet's arm.

"Captain Snaith, Japhet ... is it Captain Snaith yonder?" I faltered.

"Yes," he answered, 'twixt shut teeth, "the pestilent rogues are eating their suppers. Well, let us do the like."

So we began to descend the steep upon our right, following Caripuna, who seemed to have cat's eyes, for he went unfaltering in this darkness and never at a loss, until he had brought us to a sheltered nook shut in by rocks and leafage,

where a little freshet gurgled pleasantly; and here we made our camp for the night.

Being thus secluded, Japhet presently made a fire, whereat he and Caripuna set about plucking and preparing a strange large fowl that had fallen to one of Caripuna's silent, unerring shafts, but I so troubled and foredone that, so soon as I had laved my weary feet in the brook, I wrapped a blanket about me and lay down in the firelight, telling Japhet I had no appetite; whereat he must from cook play physician, feeling my pulse and demanding to see my tongue, etc., at the same time vowing I had never looked more blooming. But seeing he mocked me, I turned my back on him and, comforted by the leaping firelight and his nearness, forgot my anxious fears awhile in a sweet and blessed sleep.

From this I was aroused by Japhet's cheery voice calling me to supper and all about me a fragrance so savoury as set my mouth a-watering; in fine, I found this bird extreme delicate in the eating, and moreover, we supped from Inca dishes or tureens of beaten gold, very splendid.

Supper done, I washed these dishes and divers other cooking utensils right dutifully, and stretched myself out where sat Japhet in the firelight, but glancing across at Caripuna and noting how carefully he was trimming the sight feathers of his arrows, up I sat again, moved by sudden apprehension.

"Japhet," said I, with the utmost determination, "if you should indeed be so mad to attempt any attack on Captain Snaith and his men, I'll be mad also, for I shall go with you—"

"Sdeath—no!" he exclaimed, starting round on me.

"Slife—yes!" I retorted. "Where you go, I go."

"And if I forbid thee, woman?"

"We are not on your ship, Sir Captain Tyranny."

"Why, then," quoth he, viewing me askance, "I must contrive some device, some scheme o' tactics against your confounding wilfulness."

"So, then," cried I in growing alarm, "you do purpose some such madness, do you—do you?" But instead of answering, he fell a-singing his odious song of Yo-ho; and the more earnestly I questioned, the louder he sang, till I in a fury drew my blanket about me and lay down where I might watch the tiresome wretch, resolved to be thus wakeful all night rather than suffer him to steal away courting (as it were) wounds and death in such heartless sly fashion. Now scarce had I set myself thus to keep guard on him than, by some cruel perversity, a yearning for slumber crept upon me, my weary eyes smarted so that perforce I closed them and could have sunk to sleep, but instead I forced myself to sit up, leaned me against a tree, rubbed my poor eyes, set my teeth against slumber, vowing to keep awake, and so drowsed into such sleep that I mind nothing more until the young sun's dazzling beam waked me, and starting up, I saw Japhet within a yard of me and very fast asleep; and thinking he showed strangely worn and haggard in this dawn light, I leaned nearer to him and thus espied his hand bloody, and a rough and very inadequate bandage girt about his left forearm. This sorry bandage I set myself instantly to remove, as gently as might be, yet contrived he should wake to answer for having thus perilled his life and (moreover) for his base desertion of poor, sleeping me.

"So then," quoth I, sadly reproachful, so soon as he had opened blinking eyes, "so then, Japhet, you must creep away to your fighting, and I asleep and all defenceless! You could dare actually leave me to be ravished by vile men, slain by foul serpents, or wake and perish of fright or—"

"Sleep like a babe, sweet lass, ay, a pretty, buxom babe, and wake thus all vivid with abundant life to revile the poor, meek fellow that now bids thee a fair good morrow."

"And bring me this for your pains!" said I, pointing at his wound which I was glad to see of no great moment.

"And which is worse," quoth he, shaking his head and sighing, "the same ball put my musket out of action."

"Come you to the water, fool man, that I may bathe it."

"Thanks, gracious madam, I can do this for myself."

But as we wrangled thus, from the height above us came Caripuna's birdlike call, at the which signal Japhet leapt where

lay his sword and pistols, snatched them and began to scramble up the ascent, all heedless of my angry questions and expostulations until, seeing me about to follow, he paused to scowl down on me, gesturing me back so imperiously as angered me the more.

"Bide where you are!" cried he. "Your duty is to prepare breakfast against our return,—bide and do it!" And away he went, faster than ever. This set me in such fury that, scarce knowing what I did, I began to ascend after him, speedily as I might, yet when I had gained the top and paused to catch my breath, neither he nor Caripuna were in sight. Now being all distraught, I began to run forward, calling his name, and winning no answer, paused to listen for some sound of their going; but as fortune willed, a small wind had got up that set the woods a-rustling here and there. These sounds lured me on to run hither and thither like any wild creature, until at last, wearied and despairing, I stood all bemused, knowing not whither to turn; and presently feeling myself utterly lost in this dreadful wilderness, panic seized me and I sped on again, crying alternate on God and Japhet, like the poor demented creature I was, wounding myself on thorns and falling over unseen obstacles, but pushing on and ever on through these tangled mazes until a clinging vine brought me down again headlong, and there lay I in such woeful state of mind and body as turns me faint to think upon even now.

For some while I lay thus supine in very agony of despair until, dreadfully plain and distinct, I heard the explosion of firearms in rapid succession with fury of shouting; and stumbling to my feet, I began to creep thitherward, because thereabouts I knew would be Japhet, yet now I no longer dared call his name. Very slowly I went, pausing often to glance fearfully about me, and straining my ears, though to no purpose, for now was a dreadful, brooding silence.

Up rose the sun and up, his fierce rays piercing these leafy solitudes to scorch me until, faint with this breathless heat (for the gentle wind came too seldom), parched with thirst and wearied with my hopeless wandering, I sank down at last, spent and all foredone.

How long I lay thus inanimate is beyond my guess, but when I opened my weary eyes, the first things I espied were two worn and broken shoes adorned with handsome silver buckles, sturdy legs in torn stockings, a squat, powerful body in tattered finery of velvet and lace, topped by a tanned visage that seemed all hair, teeth and eyes. For a long, breathless moment we stared on each other, each of us alike silent and motionless; and then:

"Oh, Tony!" he called in hushed, furtive manner. "Oh, Tony, come and lookee here."

Ensued a leafy rustling and another face was peering at me over this first man's shoulder, a smoothly handsome face and yet methought it more evil than the other. So for a space we remained, silent and motionless all three until, seeing how their eyes gloated on me, I leapt suddenly afoot to run from them; but scarce had I gone a yard than their arms were about me and their wicked, brutal hands had shamed me to trembling submission.

"Well—a, my Tom, she is the prize—no? And to us. How say-a you, Tom? What then?"

"Have her to the Cap'n, I reckon, messmate."

"Well—but—why him, Tom?"

"For that 'tis the lady as he hankers arter; 'tis her as us ha' been chasing."

"Ay, ay, Tom; but—a why—a not—you and me first—?"

Here, shuddering at the evil of them, I screamed, whereupon they strove to choke me to silence, but I fought them off, screaming the louder until came running a little, ragged, fierce man who, snatching pistol from belt, roared in marvellous great voice.

"Avast, sons o' dogs, stand off or I'll bowel ye," and into his other hand came a long knife.

"Belay, Bosun," growled the fellow Tom, falling back before the little man's threatening aspect. "Me and Tony weren't nowise arter no 'arm, Ned, none in the world, Neddy."

"Ay, ay," boomed the little bosun, "'od rot the lying tongues o' ye! Haul off, cast about, stand off and on. If the woman's here, t'others should be skulking about—come, bouse about and stand away, and lively, ye scratchings!"

Glancing on me with a bestial avidity, these two men turned and slouched away, growling like the two-legged animals they were, while the bosun, plucking a silver whistle from his rags, sounded a melodious call that minded me tearfully of

Absalom Troy and the dear *Joyful Deliverance*. Thus presently came other ragged fellows to tongue their lips and goggle at me and, with these, a gigantic Negro, whose black visage seemed all fierce, rolling eyes and flashing teeth.

"Ay, here she be, my hearties," nodded the little bosun, gesturing towards me with his pistol. "If she'll walk so be it; if she won't, hoist and carry her."

So like the poor victim for the killing (and worse) went I with these fierce men, sick to the very soul of me and heedless of all direction until of a sudden I saw the river before me and found myself in a small bay, shady with trees, where ran a little merry brook to join the river; and seated beside this brook, eating and drinking together in great amity, Mr. John and a long, dark, comely man in travel-stained finery, whose dark features were off-set by trimly pointed beard, and whose quick-moving hands flashed and sparkled with the rings that decked his almost every finger. Catching sight of me, he seemed stricken motionless; even his jaws ceased munching while his glance roved over me, and into his wide eyes came such wild-beast glare that from him I looked at Mr. John who, rising on the instant, bowed to me with graceful flourish.

"Why, Madam Ursula," said he, glancing at me through drooping lashes, "this is a joy wholly unexpected. And how doth our Japhet, my accursed cousin? Cometh he with you?"

"God forbid!" said I fervently.

CHAPTER XLVI

TELLETH HOW I LOOKED ON A NOBLE DYING

As a kindly Providence tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, so God in His mercy lendeth us on occasion a strength far above our own, lifting us out of despair and above panic fear, enduing us with a courage so nearly divine we may endure to the uttermost so long as we know ourselves the children of His ever-loving care. Thus I, a lonely woman cast to the merciless will of these men that showed more like savage beasts, yet believing God my sure defence, stood serene and undismayed, even when having chewed and swallowed, this dark-faced man spake in slow, cultured speech:

"So—this is she, eh, my lord! This prime armful of beauty is your Japhet's woman, ha?"

"She is his lady, Snaith; she is Japhet's wedded wife."

"His wife! Oh, most excellent! And such proud madam, such luscious piece,—a voluptuous creature. How is she named, my lord?"

"Nay, ask herself."

"My name," said I, keeping my scornful gaze on Mr. John's averted face, "is Ursula."

"Well, I like thee, Ursula, and shall doubtless like thee better anon, for thou'rt a lovesome thing, I vow and protest. Our Japhet hath a shrewd eye for women. There was one, I mind, a Spanish beauty at La Margarita—though she was dark."

Now at these fearful words I quailed, my very soul grew sick and, in this moment, my faith in a merciful Providence wavered, for God had suffered this same poor lady to endure such evil she had chosen to die; and wherefore should the Almighty contrive a special Providence on my behalf? Ah, never have I known such mental anguish as in this moment of dreadful doubt and loss.... And then I seemed to hear again Japhet's wild cry to God—"Not again, not this woman too—not again!" And so now prayed I in my heart and so passionately that all else became as it were unreal; thus in a measure my faith and courage were restored and I became aware that Captain Snaith was speaking me in his smooth, deliberate tones.

"So come you, madam, hither to me, my Ursula! Quit your prudish stateliness, your mock-modest airs; you and I must grow sudden acquaint and sweetly intimate, for thou'rt mine, Ursula, and what I have, I hold a while. Come, give's thy hand now, a kiss on those slim fingers and so presently to thy honey mouth—"

"Ay, but," quoth Mr. John, refilling his cannikin, "bethink you, Captain; such caresses should savour sweeter were they enjoyed before my damned cousin Japhet's very face."

"Aha—true for you, my lord!" cried Snaith with sudden laugh. "Passion o' Venus—yes! 'Sblood, Aldbourne, you must hate our Japhet as I do—almost."

"More, Snaith, more! Well now, since you have his wife, I'll warrant me he shall attempt her rescue, and soon, Captain! Madam Ursula is the lure shall bring him in reach o' your claws. No more shooting from ambush, to-night he'll give us desperate battle; ay, with darkness he and his Indians will rush our camp."

"His Indians!" repeated the Captain, his dark face contorted with sudden wild fury. "His accursed savages! Four o' my best and jolliest lads dead and scalped since we came ashore."

Here he smiled up at me, though his eyes were a menace.

"Sweetheart," said he, reaching forth his hand to me with detestable assurance, "tell thy new-found lover of these damned Indians; how many march to Captain Japhet's order to molest us?"

"Sir," I answered, gazing beyond him towards the river, "were I to tell you a thousand you would not believe."

"Not if you said fifty or twenty.... Well,—how many? And when you answer—look at me, woman."

"No!" said I.

"How then," he laughed; "do I so affright thy modesty, shame thy tender coyness? Am I so fearsome to behold?"

"Indeed," said I; "so do I use my eyes to better purpose."

"Well damme Aldbourne," he laughed, "but here's spirited beauty; no puling, modest Timidity to weep and plead and swoon, but a woman to battle with, a pride to vanquish, eh, my lord?"

"Ay, faith, she's all o' this and more, Snaith, more, being dame o' breeding and English as I ... or you. And speaking o' battle, bringeth us back to Japhet and his Indians and these at a guess shall be nine, ten or a round dozen,—eh, Ursula?"

But instead of answering, I viewed this renegade John with such bitter contempt that he had the grace to change colour.

"Come, my proud witch," cried Snaith, "sweet puss, be seated here betwixt us—sit, I say! How, must I insist?" And up he rose, to grasp at me with compelling clutch and in his eyes that wild-beast glare, but Mr. John had risen too and as I fronted my aggressor boldly as I might, though I read that in his merciless regard which appalled me, in this moment Mr. John spoke and in his sleepy voice that ever reminded me of Japhet:

"Mistress Ursula, pray be seated, for though you may contemn us for rogue pirates and what not, yet are we Englishmen both and, once on a time, were gentlemen, eh, Snaith?" The Captain merely laughed, bowing to me with an odious exaggeration; and so seeing no help for it, I sat me down betwixt them, and instantly began to wish myself dead (or very nearly) for this vile man sprawled so near as to touch me with his knee, his arm and shoulder, and presently seizing upon my hand, began to fondle and toy with it.

"A gentleman!" he repeated wistfully. "Ay, faith, but that was long since; to-day I am mere man and thou such woman as sure no man may long resist,—not this man—eh, Ursula?" And here he lifts my hand to his lips, yet ere he might kiss it, I snatched it away.

"Excellent!" quoth he, leering upon me. "Would God Japhet were here ... except we take him soon, I must at thee. And talking o' Japhet, hath he ever told thee how we were messmates on a time, sweetheart? How now—will ye be dumb? Why, then, 'stead o' speech, let's kiss—come, give me that red mouth o' thine—Ha', what the devil, Aldbourne!" he exclaimed pettishly, for Mr. John had started up to stand peering aloft at the dense thickets that crowned the bank above us. "What the devil ails you, man?"

"Japhet!" cried Mr. John fiercely, his gaze still searching the leafage above us. "Japhet, damn him! I tell you he's desperate, Snaith, and may come down on us at any moment with his Indians and we sitting here a fair mark for their shot."

"Well, but my lads are up and awake—"

"So were they last night and three died. Whiles your fools are scattered, beating to and fro i' the woods yonder, these cursed Indians shall steal through them and upon us, and we shall be dead, and Japhet off with his wife, or ever your dull-witted fellows can fire a shot."

"Sblood!" exclaimed the Captain, rising the better to peer about also. "You grow mighty uneasy and suddenly too! Curse it, man, why this quick alarm?"

"Now look you, Snaith—pah, forget the woman awhile and hark to me!—Yonder somewhere in these cursed thickets creeps death for you and me, for there cometh my damned cousin Japhet as stealthily, as quick and deadly as any snake, ay, and as merciless. Well, shall he smite us unseen as he hath done time and again?"

"Well," snarled the Captain, "what the plague would ye have me do?"

"Summon your company and let us march."

"Ay, and whither shall we march? I have rendezvous with Rogerson hereabouts. In another hour 'twill be dark and what then? No, no, this place is very well and here we camp, at the least I and my lady Sweetlips; your lordship may camp where he will." So saying, he set a whistle to his mouth and sounded a shrill note that was answered afar by the bosun's twittering pipe; and after some while, with prodigious rustle and scrambling amid the undergrowth, men appeared, twelve I counted, and amongst these the little bosun, who approached the Captain, knuckling an eyebrow.

"Bosun," said Snaith, glancing up and around, even as had Mr. John, "set the lads to building me a lodge to shelter her ladyship's grace to-night, and thereafter make camp and double the watch."

Obedient to the small bosun's hoarse roar, these ragged fellows stacked their muskets and while some of them busied themselves cutting saplings to constructing a hut, others set a fire a-going and I, seated beside the brook, watched the stir and bustle about me, voicing silent prayers for Japhet, his safety and my own deliverance; but even now, as I prayed thus, came this Captain who, plucking me to my feet, set his arm about me. Desperately I strove to free myself, only to feel his wicked arm crushing the breath and strength from me; I struck at him passionately but, laughing, he caught my wrist, turning and twisting my arm until I nearly screamed with the pain of it.

"Come, weep!" said he gently. "Sigh, moan, plead, ye sweet vixen; pray to me for mercy, beseech my kindness."

Dumbly I endured, looking wildly about for some one to aid me, but Mr. John was nowhere in sight and such men as met my look leered or nodded, chuckling. "Come, sweetheart," he laughed, "plead to be kissed—"

"The Innocent Blood! The Innocent Blood! 'Od rot ye for damned murderer,—to hell, to hell, to hell!"

This dreadful screeching rang out so sudden, so loud and inhuman that Captain Smith started, his cruel hold relaxed and then I was fleeing towards the river, purposing in my extremity of despair to trust myself to these death-infested waters rather than endure the unspeakable abomination that threatened; but ere I might reach the river, mighty arms seized and held me, whereat I screamed till merciless fingers choked and dragged me back amid the undergrowth, and I looked up into the black, grinning visage of the great Negro.

"Ay, so, Pompey lad," quoth Captain Snaith, leering down on me. "Choke her squeaks and keep her out o' sight whiles I parley with whoso comes. You, Tom and Pedro, stand by; we must have this canoe." So off he strode riverwards, the two men lurking at his heels.

Now presently, though I could not see Doctor Swayne, I heard the beat of his paddle drawing nearer and would have screamed a warning but for the merciless fingers on my throat. And presently, sure enough, I heard Doctor Swayne's voice (sounding very kindly familiar to poor me):

"Ashore there! What's to do?"

"Enough and to spare, sir," answered Snaith in his pleasant, hearty tones. "But pray, who are you that asks, and in good English too?"

"Matthew Swayne am I, Brother, doctor o' medicine and surgery and friend to all in need. But surely I heard a woman scream?"

"Ay, you did, sir, you did," answered Snaith, "a poor, distract creature we found wandering solitary hereabouts and needeth your healing arts, sir, as do certain o' my poor lads. So come ashore, my good sir; come ashore and be right welcome."

Now presently, by the sounds ensuing, I guessed that good Doctor Swayne was indeed coming ashore, and I would have shrieked him warning but this monstrous Negro's cruel fingers cut off my breath, strangling me till his rolling eyes, flashing teeth and great black visage loomed hugely on my failing sight.

"Ha, will ye kill the wench, y' black spawn!" boomed a voice; then the strangling fingers were gone and I upon my knees, gasping for very life. And presently recovering somewhat, I saw the giant blackamoor crouched and whimpering before the little fierce bosun; then I was up and running for the river and thus suddenly beheld Master Swayne walking arm in arm with Captain Snaith. At sight of me, the Doctor halted so suddenly that the parrot on his shoulder fluttered his wings, to keep his balance.

"Lord of Mercy!" exclaimed Doctor Swayne and next moment I was in his arms, gasping out my tale and beseeching his protection; nor did I cry him in vain, for with one arm yet fast about me, he turned and fronted Captain Snaith, looking from the smiling evil of him to the brutal faces that hemmed us in; and his arm was strong about me and when he spoke, his voice was loud and undismayed.

"Brothers," cried he, "shame not the women that bore ye; for sake o' your own mothers harm not this woman. Brethren

all, up aloft yonder sitteth our God, very ware and watchful, to love or damn us, according to our acts. So harm not this woman, lest Almighty God smite ye one and all—death and damnation—Amen!"

Thus spoke this valiant Doctor Swayne, looking round upon these wild fellows each and every and for a long moment was a strange hush; yea, even Captain Snaith stood mute and then upon this awed silence rose the parrot's screech:

"The Innocent Blood! The Innocent Blood! 'Od rot ye for damned murderer! To hell, to hell, to hell!"

Scarce had this dreadful screaming died away than Captain Snaith laughed.

"What then, bully lads," cried he, "shall silly bird preach us likewise? Silence it, Pompey!"

The great blackamoor leapt to snatch, to twist at and wring the poor fluttering creature in his cruel hands and, hurling it to earth, kicked it to Doctor Swayne's feet; whereat Captain Snaith laughed:

"Come, doctor that, Master Surgeon, and cure it if you can."

Now looking down at this pitiful heap of broken feathers, "Well, now," sighed Doctor Swayne, "there lieth Conscience shall nevermore denounce me—now what shall this portend?"

"No matter for this, sir," answered Snaith peremptorily, "there be divers o' my bully lads do need your care—"

"This moment, Brother, if you'll show me where they lie."

"There be three lying i' the cave yonder. Black Pompey shall pilot ye—and you can unhand young madam there; she and I are ripe for a little pretty dalliance—" Doctor Swayne turned on the speaker so suddenly that he blinked, but the evil smile on his bearded lips widened.

"Come, Doctor," quoth he, "begone you to your surgery and leave this luscious armful to me—"

"Never!" cried Doctor Swayne. "Never whiles I live. Oh, Iniquity—ha, thou lewd beast ... oh, man, take heed what ye do, for this woman, though she lie at thy mercy, is yet in the very hand o' the Lord, and God is not mocked—"

"No more am I!" retorted Captain Snaith. "So be done wi' your babble; loose me the woman and go. Well, do you obey, Master Swayne?"

"Yea, verily," he answered, raising clenched hand. "I humbly obey the will o' God, which is to protect this Innocent whiles I live—"

"Pompey!" said the Captain softly, and made a small ugly gesture with his thumb. I saw the great Negro crouch; I saw the glitter of steel, but as he leapt, Doctor Swayne turned to front the menace, his protecting arms above me wide-spread like a cross; I saw the flash of that murderous steel, heard a slow-drawn, hissing breath and Doctor Swayne sank slowly to his knees as if in prayer; then, swaying sidelong, lay outstretched at my feet.

"God be praised ... my pilgrimage ... is ended," he gasped. "Fear nothing, child, for—the Lord ... He watcheth thee—" The painful whisper ended, the failing hands fumbled weakly and, knowing what they sought, I opened the leathern bag at his girdle and, taking thence the grisly thing it had hidden, set it in his grasp; and thus, with the skull of his dead friend cherished to him, he smiled on me and so his strange, brave spirit passed. And for a while (as it seemed) none of that fierce company moved or spake, for I heard no sound, and no hand touched me.

But this strange quiet was broken by the sudden report of firearms near by and din of fierce shouting, but I, looking yet upon this good man so suddenly dead, paid no heed till, roused by trampling feet and Captain Snaith's voice upraised in shout of gloating triumph, I looked up and thus beheld a crowd of men who cheered also and flourished swords and muskets, and stumbling between them, his arms fast bound, his face spattered with blood—my Japhet.

CHAPTER XLVII

SHOWETH HOW INDEED BLOOD IS THICKER THAN WATER

Crouched thus upon my knees, and now utterly despairing, I gazed up at him and he (beholding me) seemed to despair also, for all heedless of his own hurts, the fierce hands that dragged and wrenched at him so cruelly and of Captain Snaith's beastly triumph, Japhet looked only at me, uttering no word, but in his eyes I read such appeal, such agonized, fearful question that rising to my feet:

"Japhet," said I, "my husband, I am yet thine own and with God's aid will be so ever and always, or show thee now how an Englishwoman can die—"

At this Snaith laughed very joyfully; cried he:

"Your wife, eh, Japhet? And a fine, proud piece, a right passionate beauty; hast a true eye for womenkind, old shipmate, I mind. There was yon raven-haired Spanish beauty, years ago, and now this golden Venus, thy devoted wife. Watch now and see her kissed!"

But when he would have done so, I strove against him with such desperate strength he must needs order them to tie my hands behind me; this done, and I helpless, he took me in his arms and kissed me often and how he would and indeed so shamefully that when at last he released me, I hung my head nor dared so much as glance towards where stood Japhet so dreadfully dumb and still.

By Captain Snaith's command we were brought where they had constructed the little hut or lodge (as I have told) in remote part of the camp.

"Yon tree, lads," quoth the Captain, pointing, "seize him to yon tree and lash him fast." And when the men had bound Japhet to this tree, at sign from their Captain they left us, each and every, muttering together and chuckling evilly,—only Pompey the great Negro remained.

"Well, Japhet, old shipmate," said the Captain in his hatefully jovial voice, so soon as we were alone, "here's you that vowed my death and hunted me so close; here's you fast by the heels to live awhile, ay, long enough to see me tame this proud wife o' yours to greater kindness! Look, Japhet man,—nay, damn ye, open your eyes and watch now or Pompey shall cut off thine eyelids, old messmate—so open and watch, I say—"

"What, Snaith ... why, here's luck!" cried an exulting voice and forth of the adjacent thickets stepped Mr. John. "By all that's marvellous, 'tis my damned cousin at last—his very self! Here's pure joy!" And upon his face such look of hateful triumph as made me loathe and scorn him even more than I did Captain Snaith (if this were possible). Having thus spoken, he stepped where stood Japhet all helpless in his bonds, and fetched him such buffet that I cried out on him; but all unheeding me:

"Ha, Japhet," he laughed, "what now of your damned arrogance and boasted vengeance, eh, cousin—eh?"

"Enough, my lord, enough!" cried Captain Snaith. "Faith, you shall ha' your way with our Japhet ere I end him, but for the present be so good to leave us—"

"Eh—leave you, Snaith?" repeated Mr. John, "Why, how now; wherefore, why, man, and to what purpose?"

"To most excellent and delightful purpose," laughed Captain Snaith, setting his wicked arm about me. "Damme, Aldbourne, can't you see, man? I and this fine lady would be alone with our watchful Japhet—three's company, man, so off with ye awhile!" But here to my surprise, and most thankful relief, Mr. John seated himself very deliberately and, looking from Snaith to Japhet and back again, began to laugh. Now this laughter seemed greatly to astonish Snaith (and no wonder), for he stood a moment speechless and agape.

"Oh, perfect," gasps Mr. John, wiping his eyes. "Oh, most perfect!"

"Eh?" says Snaith, beginning to laugh also. "Eh, Aldbourne, you mean? Nay, what a-plague do you mean?"

"That you have my envy, Snaith, and my admiration! That my damned cousin must stand helpless to see his proud lady

wife so used—here's that shall sate even such hatred as mine—Snaith man, I salute you!" Here he bowed very ceremoniously.

"Why, then," laughed Snaith, tightening merciless arms about me, for I had begun to struggle against him, "help me bear this handsome rebel to our love bower yonder—" And he began to drag me towards the little lodge that stood over against Japhet's tree. But in this dreadful moment, sick with despair, crying I know not what, I glanced towards Japhet and beheld such miracle I misdoubted my very eyes for, even as I cried upon him, his bonds fell away and, rubbing at numbed arms and wrists, he spoke:

"Snaith," said he in dreadful, passionless voice, "let us make an end! Here's death for you or me, Roger!"

Whirling me aside so fiercely that I stumbled and fell, Captain Snaith turned at sound of these terrible words, but Japhet was on him or ever he might shout—yet even so I heard a thin, strangling cry of: "Pompey!"

But this great Negro was crouched helpless on his knees before Mr. John, staring wildly at the two long pistols that menaced him, for in Mr. John's fierce eyes death glared ... and, beyond these two, Japhet and Captain Snaith swayed, fast locked in furious grapple and naught to hear but the muffled trampling of their feet... I saw Snaith's features contorted with a dire anguish, for Japhet's powerful fingers were about his throat, choking him to silence, and on Japhet's face such hateful look of joyous ferocity I covered my eyes not to see.... And presently, though I scarce dared even glimpse them, they were down, their writhing bodies twisted together and floundering and still that same ghastly dumbness....

"Your knife, man!" cried Mr. John, in hoarse whisper, "quick, ere we're surprised—the knife!"

"There's ... no ... need!"

I saw Mr. John's heavy pistol thwack down on Pompey's woolly crown, saw his huge body sink beneath that vicious blow to lie all asprawl. Then my hands were free and, with their arms about me, I was running between them almost ere I knew it—running like one in a dream. And presently as we sped thus, Mr. John gasped, questioning:

"Snaith? Dead? Is he?"

"I'll warrant ... him!" panted Japhet in answer. Then we had reached the river, I was lifted into a canoe that shot out upon the waters all aglow with sunset. And in this canoe I saw three or four muskets and, with these, Japhet's own battleworn sword, the which I showed him, though he did but nod his poor battered head at it and very listlessly and never a word or look for me.

And now because I recognized this canoe (that it seemed was to prove our salvation) for that same weather-beaten craft had borne Doctor Swayne so many weary miles upon his Pilgrimage of Service, I bowed my head and wept for him (though silently), whiles the sunset glory faded from the wide waters about us and it was night.

CHAPTER XLVIII

WHICH IS A CHAPTER OF RECRIMINATION

So thus in Doctor Swayne's canoe (this ark of safety) we sped and all of us very silent by reason (as I guess) of what had so lately befallen.

As for my poor trembling self, I lay huddled like one new awaking from dreadful nightmare, for indeed to be translated thus suddenly from the black abyss of despair to this blessed security and new joy of life had bemused me quite beyond speech; thus, as I crouched silent betwixt these two silent men, I could but think how God of His infinite mercy had delivered me thus miraculously from shameful evils and a dreadful death (and restored Japhet to me moreover) and thus, though my lips were dumb, I poured out my very soul to God in a gratitude far beyond mere words.

I was yet rapt in this mute ecstasy of prayer when, to my shocked and fearful amazement, Japhet brake forth to such fury of oaths and cursing as struck and held me (for the moment) quite speechless; and, while I yet sat thus dumb-struck, to my further wonderment Mr. John began to laugh softly.

The moon was not up as yet and thus, glancing from him that had cursed to him that laughed, I saw then no more than vague shapes against a splendour of stars.

"In heaven's name," cried I, finding voice at last, "are you both gone mad?" Here, finding they neither answered or so much as heeded me in the least, I reproached them as methought they deserved:

"Think shame on yourselves," said I, looking from one dim shape to the other, "to so curse and laugh when you should be crying your humble thanks to God for this miracle He hath wrought to our so merciful salvation!" Here, they proving yet dumb:

"But indeed," said I, turning towards Japhet, "I am still in very maze of wonder how we are here thus all safe together again; indeed, 'tis marvellous! For—oh, Japhet—one moment I saw you helpless and nigh swooning in your cruel bonds and then you had snapped them asunder, were free and had leapt to my deliverance. Ah, truly in that moment God must have given you strength of giant—"

"Well—no, ma'am!" he answered in his hateful, sleepy voice, "I should rather say 'twas our rogue Johnny's penknife."

"Oh!" gasped I, and then, "Oh, but I saw no knife—"

"Neither did Snaith, ma'm."

"John ... his knife?" I repeated. "Tell me how ... how?"

"'Twas when he struck and reviled me, ma'm, for while his left hand smote, his right hand snicked my bound wrists asunder and into my fingers slipped the knife."

"And 'twas Mr. John ... 'twas John did this?" cried I. "And now indeed I mind how he kept the great blackamoor from you ... so 'twas Mr. John that saved us—?"

"Ay, faith, ma'm; but for him, my wife would now be shamed to death and myself dying by inches in torment ... but for Johnny! A woeful end to both of us but for our damned Johnny! And there's the devilish irony of it!"

Now at this I turned where Mr. John sat paddling, his dim form dimmer by reason of my sudden tears.

"Oh, Mr. John," cried I, "oh, dear friend John, how cruelly I have misjudged thee—"

"Never a whit!" snorted Japhet. "You judged him for rogue—"

"No, no!" cried I. "To-night, by perilling his life to our salvation a new John is born and one that I must needs love and honour—"

"Honour, madam? 'Sdeath, shall five minutes or so offset and wipe out a lifetime's black villainy then?"

"Yes!" quoth I fervently. "Despite all past hate and wrong, this John saved thy life, Japhet, because he is in very truth a noble man. Have you no kind word for him ... this John that saved me to thee, Japhet?"

"Sdeath!" he broke in fiercely, "You harp on't! Johnny saved thee and Johnny saved me! Johnny pours coals o' fire on my head, you pour fulsome flatteries on his; ha, to the devil with Johnny—"

"Be silent!" cried I and then, leaning towards that speechless, dim-seen figure in the bow:

"Mr. John," said I, "oh, John dear, for the cruel thoughts I have harboured against thee, for all the harsh words I have ever spoken thee, now do I humbly crave forgiveness—"

"Ha, damme!" exclaimed Japhet, "but you'll be for kissing him next."

"Why, so I will," I retorted, "if I may and when I may, for by heavens, he shall be dear to me as a brother henceforth!"

Here Japhet seemed to choke and before he might grow articulate:

"And you," quoth I, "oh, Japhet, are you nowise grateful to him?"

"Ay, faith, ma'm," he snorted, "so passing grateful I could fetch him a clout wi' my paddle very joyfully!" At this I was silent for very shame of him (and he my husband!); then to shame was added hot anger that must needs be spoken:

"So then," cried I, scornfully, "because your valiant cousin John dared his life to save us from the dire evils your own foolhardy rashness brought down on us, you, in your sullen pride and wicked hate, must curse and swear and gibe at him instead of being humbly grateful to him and—to our so merciful God!"

"Snoggers!" he exclaimed, in his coarse sailorman's voice, "So here's our rogue Johnny in association with God, eh, ma'm! And lookee, my poppet, all by reason of your own wilful folly and disobedience! 'Stead of biding in safety, whiles Caripuna and I took toll o' yon rogues, playing 'em Hell's delight, you must run yourself into Snaith's foul clutches, whereupon I, be sure, must get myself rapped o' the sponce and tied up like so much dunnage that Johnny may leap in and play Providence to the helpless pair of us! And all, as I say, all by reason o' your own curst wilfulness, ma'm!"

Here was a moment of silence and then, once again, I accosted that so mute, dim-seen shape in the bow:

"Oh, John ... John my dear, pray you heed not this graceless Japhet that, for all his manhood, showeth like sullen boy and yet is truly so much better than he would have us think that, for my sake, John dear, I humbly beg you'll forgive him!" Now this touched my sullen wretch on the raw (as indeed I'd hoped it might) for he made such violent, furious gesture as rocked the canoe.

"Forgive?" saith he, in strangling tone. "You plead rogue Johnny's forgiveness ... on me?"

"Ay, most humbly!" said I. "And I now beg your silence that he may speak, if he kindly will."

And presently, swaying easily to his paddle, John made answer, and in his voice a wistfulness that touched me strangely:

"Ursula ... sweet child, your generous, loving thoughts of me are such joy I must needs wish myself more worthy. As to your Japhet, he hath my sympathy, for 'tis evident he feels as I felt when he hauled my miserable, half-dead carcass out of the morass. To hate properly the enemy that hath saved one's life is something awkward, as I know, and the ready ability to express gratitude to one's approved enemy smacks more of heaven than earth, and alas, Ursula, I am of the earth very earthy and Japhet is—Japhet."

"Why then," said I and stopped suddenly as, from the dark mysteries behind us, rose a distant shouting pierced by many shots in rapid succession, a vague, wild hubbub that spoke of desperate strife.

"Yon should be Snaith's villains," said John, ceasing to paddle.

"Ay, so I think," answered Japhet, also ceasing to paddle. "Now what shall ha' set them by the ears? Hark to the rogues ... death's busy among 'em ... but how and why?"

"Hostile Indians mayhap," says John.

"And yet to my knowledge there are none such hereabouts."

"Oh, pray let us go on!" said I, for borne by the current that seemed to be against us, we were drifting backward.

"Nay but," said Japhet, in his dogged fashion, "why should the rogues be in such ploy—?"

"And hark to yon scream!" said John. "One surely died then, eh, Japhet?"

"Ay, like enough. And lookee, such lawless crew will quarrel because they be drunk, or for women, or—Ursula, what o' your jewels?" Now at this, I clapped hands to my bosom and cried out in dismay for, sure enough, my doeskin bag with its treasure of gems was gone; as, nigh weeping, I told him.

"Why, then all's explained, Ursula; your loss is death yonder."

"And pray," questions John, "what like are these jewels?"

"Diamonds, pearls and what not," answered Japhet, "gems she had of Yupanaqui and worth a king's ransom, as the saying goes. Now had I but my trusty Caripuna to my back, I'd go chance their recovery, for when Roguery fights, Honesty may come by its own. But Caripuna should be at Bartlemy's Bay by now, I reckon."

"Well, I am here," says John.

"You?" saith Japhet.

"Myself!" answers John.

"Hum!" quoth Japhet in musing voice; then up came the moon and these two eyeing each other in its waxing radiance.

"Wouldst adventure it, John?"

"Ay, with all my heart!" Here again they viewed each other eye to eye in the brilliant moonlight, and Japhet's poor swollen face all ghastly with dried blood:

"Why then," says he at last, and with sudden, odd-sounding laugh, "'bout ship, Johnny man, and let's to it." But now I cried out on them, vowing all the jewels in the world were not worth such hazard; but to no purpose, for saith Japhet:

"These jewels were thine, Ma'm Bly, and what's thine is mine, and 'tis in my mind we shall sorely need such fortune one day. Also 'tis just possible Snaith may be crawling yet, since such vermin do ever die hard."

"This is madness!" cried I, for they had turned the canoe and now we were speeding back and much faster than we had come. "And you are sick with your hurts, Japhet!"

"Faith, I never felt heartier."

"Japhet, you rush upon destruction."

"This is as may be, ma'm, but for the nonce, sweet poppet, be seen and not heard."

And now we went in silence save for the ripple of these moon-bright waters, for the night was windless and very still; also the sounds of distant fight had died all away. High above us rode a great moon and in such splendour that all things showed very clear and marvellous distinct.

After some while Japhet steered us close inshore where the moon's radiant beams might not reach us, and in the shadow of mighty trees crept we, and now with scarce a ripple. Presently rounding a bend I saw again, though at some distance, that same little bay where Doctor Swayne had died so nobly and I had endured so much, that now I trembled anew and grew faint at mere sight of it, though it showed all deserted and no sound to hear; then it was hidden from me and our canoe touched the shore. So we landed, all three of us, and stood a long moment to listen, scarce breathing, yet naught to hear save the soft rippling murmur of these flowing waters. Then, having belted on his sword, Japhet caught up two pistols from the canoe and glancing at their primings, spoke low-voiced:

"Ursula, once again I bid you wait and stir not. And do you, John—"

"Well?" saith John, whispering.

"See to it she obeys." So saying, he took a step or so away from us, hesitated and, coming back again, with sudden awkward gesture laid his hand on his cousin's shoulder, peering him close in the eyes:

"She ... will be safe in thy care, Johnny man," he murmured and so was presently gone and with never a sound. And when we had stood some while listening in an ever-growing anxiety, looking great-eyed on one another and round about:

"Oh, John," I whispered, slipping my hand within his arm, "to wait thus—and wait! I grow sick with foreboding!... This dreadful place ..."

"And yet," said he softly and staring down at the pistol in his hand, "I would be no other where."

"But there is evil here; I feel it all about us! Oh, Japhet is mad, wicked to run such cruel, desperate chance!"

"And yet," murmured John, his gaze still bent upon the weapon he held, "I would give all I possess, all that I am, to stand in Japhet's shoes."

"John," said I, shivering, "I think Death is very near us to-night and so I had rather you stand beside my Japhet henceforth, until Death take us,—his loved and trusty friend."

"Ah, sweet soul," sighed he, bowing his head, "can there ever be friendship 'twixt such men as Japhet and I? Can such trespass as mine ever be forgiven?"

"Oh, surely!" said I. "If it be truly repented ... and Death so very nigh."

"Repentance, child? Remorse? These are but words, and regrets all vain except a man live to prove himself and win remission; but for this I'd be quit of life nor repine, since life hath so little to offer me—"

Then my heart leapt, as forth of the shadows stepped Japhet, who stood looking at us silently a moment like one in troublous perplexity.

"John," says he, coming softly nearer and speaking below his breath, "how many went in Snaith's company?"

"Seven that were able besides Snaith and myself, and three that lay sick of their hurts; all that you and your Indians had left of them."

"Ten!" murmured Japhet, glancing this way and that. "Well, there be nine of 'em dead yonder but on none of them the jewels and besides, which is most damnable, Snaith's not among them."

"But zounds, Japhet, you made so sure of him."

"Ay, faith, Johnny, I did my best with him, but the devil protects his own, they say, and villainy dies hard."

"Why, then he's there, Japhet, and you've missed him. Let's go see."

"Come then," said Japhet, drawing my hand within his arm. "And Ursula, close your eyes when I bid, for these rogues that showed ill enough in life look worse in death, my lass."

So went we, and very silently all three, until I saw again that little lodge (that is such hateful yet unforgettable memory); and though Japhet bade me shut my eyes, I needs must cast a horrified glance hither and yon, where the bright moon revealed shapes asprawl or dreadfully contorted with ghastly faces that stared wide-eyed on vacancy.

And in this moment I remembered Doctor Swayne's dying prophecy and beholding thus its terrible fulfilment, I blanched and, turning aside, sank down where kindly foliage screened these stark horrors from my sight; while Japhet and John busied themselves in their hideous task. But soon they were back and mighty gloomy.

"Nine, eh, Johnny? All here, excepting Snaith and one other, eh, Johnny?"

"Snaith and the bosun, yes. 'Tis evident they've won off with your treasure. And now what, Japhet?"

"You and Ursula to the canoe, whiles I make a last search."

At this I would have rebelled but seeing Japhet's grim ferocity of look, I held my peace and went beside John, very

meekly obedient.

Now scarce had we glimpsed the river, for the foliage was very dense hereabouts, than I beheld dim shapes that flitted upon the marge.

"Oh, John—!" I gasped, for our canoe was taking the water; but even while I cried his name, John leapt before me as came a roaring flash from below, and thereafter Captain Snaith's hateful, mocking laugh; then John was down and I, on my knees beside him, was aware of other shots, hoarse cries, the clash of furious steel.

"Yonder!" gasped John. "Yonder—see, Japhet's at them and I useless as a cursed log—"

But look I dared not, so instead I bent above John, striving to check the blood that dabbled him. And presently beside me was Japhet.

"Leave him to me and take you this!" says he, and into my hands thrust the bag of jewels but, with scarce a look, I set it by, all my eyes for Japhet's quick, capable hands, and the pallid pain-contorted face of this man that had made his body my shield.

"Is he badly hurt?" I whispered. "Oh, is he dead?"

"Alas ... no!" sighed John, with wry smile. "For egad my exit would resolve many difficulties. Yet am I sufficiently the invalid ... to claim ... the promised kiss ... I never had. Eh ... Japhet?" Forthwith I knelt and stooped but when I would have kissed him indeed, he swooned away.



CHAPTER XLIX

IN WHICH WE START ON THE LAST STAGE OF OUR JOURNEY

I had kindled a fire and boiled water for Japhet's surgery and was now cooking supper, glancing very often towards that moonbright corner where he was yet busied with our poor invalid; and now, what with our present situation and all that had befallen me so lately, I could have wept for very weariness; but, as I sat thus woeful, presently cometh Japhet and his poor bruised face so worn and haggard, his air so strangely deject that I straightway hid my own despondency, greeting him cheerfully as I might, whereat he looked down on me with smile sadder than any tears.

"Oh, my dear," I murmured, reaching out my hand to him, "is it John? Will he die?"

"No, no," he answered in his gentlest fashion. "John is well enough—better than I dared hope; the ball took him just beneath the shoulder, cleanly in and out, a pretty wound as such things go, for by some miracle no bone is touched."

"Japhet, that same bullet was aimed at me but John saw—"

"What again, lass? The plaguey fellow must be for ever at it; saving the life o' my spouse becometh a habit with him.... But as for me, I suffered Roger Snaith to escape me and he's away to meet Rogerson and bring him and his rogues down upon us, and what think you of this, Ursula?"

"That God is merciful, Japhet, for thou art with me."

"I?" exclaimed he very bitterly, "I that brought thy sweet body into such vile jeopardy! I that have to thank another man for thy salvation! Canst yet have faith in this poor futile thing called Japhet?"

"Ah, my dear, never doubt it," said I, drawing him down to sit beside me. But now, instead of setting masterful arm about me, he sits gazing on the fire more haggardly woeful than ever.

"Ursula," says he, with a strange new diffidence, "I that never doubted myself in all my troublous days am full of doubt.... I begin to know myself for sorry failure and random fool.... I that would have played Providence am become the merest slave of circumstance.... Ineptitude on two legs am I!"

Now perceiving him thus so beyond nature humble (and this of all men!), I knew not how to answer or comfort him, so gave him to eat instead. So we began to sup together in a silent yet (to me) sweet communion.

"And your precious jewels, ma'm?" he questioned, after some while. "Hast taken 'em to thy heart again? Nest they 'twixt those sweet—?"

"No!" I answered, shivering, "nor ever shall again. They are under the tree yonder with John's sword and pistols."

"Zounds! And why there?"

"They are fouled with the blood of nine men."

"Ay, lass, and many others, like as not. Yet shall they twinkle as prettily and fetch as good a price."

"Well, I'll have none of them, Japhet."

"Oh, ma'm? And because nine lie dead yonder and rogues all? However, they saved one life to-night."

"You mean Captain Snaith?"

"Ay, I do, for when I might have dispatched him, 'stead of running sword through him, I snatched from him your jewels. So the rascal lives and, which is worse, lives but to win 'em back, for he knoweth their value and such lure shall certainly bring him to his own death—or ours. Ay, back he shall come, and with Rogerson and his rogues besides; they had rendezvous hereabouts.... So hither shall they come, soon as they may, to track and hunt us for these gems o' price—"

"Then let us leave them and go!" cried I, upstarting in panic.

"And the sooner the better!" saith he, rising also. "We must to the heights yonder and bear away till we find some place apt for defence, where we may lie close until Caripuna bring hither Barnaby and our comrades."

"But ... oh, what of poor John?"

"Eh—John?" said he in hateful voice and scowling round on me. "Shall I peril life and wife for sake of age-long enemy? Canst think me such almighty fool, Ursula?"

Now for a moment I stood dumb; then I knew, and all my doubts were swept clean away and my heart swelled with a great new gladness.

"Yes, Japhet," I answered, well-nigh weeping. "Oh, I do ... I do indeed. I know thee at last, thou very man! And, sure am I thy so godlike folly shall lift us to our paradise. It is to the arms of such noble fool I would come home at last to lie secure ... a woman so blessed that ... my Japhet ... I may not tell—" Then his arms were round me and mine about his neck.

"Ursula," he murmured, "thou lovely thing, these arms be all unworthy to hold thee ... but, my dear, thy gentle faith verily hath wrought in me such miracle these same arms shall bear John to safety or never know again the joy to hold thee close upon my heart." Now at this, be sure I kissed him and all my heart and soul in it, as I have never kissed in all my life, and for a while we forgot all else in the world until, hearing a cough behind us, we turning stood amazed, for there beyond the fire stood John armed and equipped for travel, and though he showed very pale and leaned heavily on the long musket he clutched, he smiled on us right cheerily.

"Well, Japhet," says he in hearty voice, "here am I ready to march whenso you give the word."

"Eh—march?" quoth Japhet, frowning. "Why so you shall, Johnny, back to bed. Art nowise fit for such hard travel and can't be yet awhile, wi' that hole in your shoulder."

"Tut, man!" laughs John. "And again tut, tut! You shall find me able as willing, and ready to prove it this very moment. I warned you how Snaith told me he waited here for Rogerson; well let us not argue on our going but incontinent be gone. And here, Ursula, thy treasure o' jewels. I peeped at them, are such as roguery will slay and die for."

"And so, John," said I, recoiling, "I'll have none of them ... and my pretty bag so hideously spoiled." Thus I refusing to touch the thing, Japhet took and thrust it into the breast of his worn jerkin.

So after some while, John proving deaf to all argument and importuning us to begone, Japhet chose such firearms as he needed from those dead men whiles I, with John's assistance, collected store of provisions and, with a great moon very bright above us, forth we set on this the last part and most painful of our journey. And this indeed a journey that was to bring us to our deaths or to safety at last; and for two of us a joy I scarce dared think on lest it prove in the end no more than empty dream.

Yet such dreams may verily inspire us to achievements almost beyond our strength and impossible without them, as did this dream of mine, as you shall now be told.

CHAPTER L

TELLETH OF A MIRACLE

Little heart have I or power of words to describe justly the pain and travail and all we endured upon the last part of this journey; or how we climbed precipitous slopes, fighting our way through dense and thorny tangles with brief respites by reason of John's weakness or while Japhet hewed us passage with his sword.

On and ever on went we, often reeling with weariness, faint with heat and burning with the agonies of thirst, so that there were times I yearned for somewhat to trip my aching feet that I might fall and lie, to know a while the blessed surcease of all effort; and sometimes I seemed half aswoon, stumbling blindly on (I scarce knew how) until came Japhet's ready hand or powerful arm to aid me, with John's voice to gasp me brave encouragement.

Now because all travail and suffering doth show us all (yea, each one of us), for what we truly are, the latent strengths and foibles of our characters, our hidden qualities good and evil, so we three poor wayfarers learned to estimate and know each other passing well, and beyond all doubting.

And the more we endured, the more I admired at these men my two companions and loved them (though in different fashion, to be sure). For now indeed my Japhet showed himself so truly gentle; and certain it is that without his wisdom to guide us, we must have gone astray to perish miserably in these trackless wilds, and without his resolute spirit to hearten us and bodily strength to aid our own, we must have sunk down, many's the time, in such agony of weariness that death (howso he came) must have been welcome relief.

And as for John, this so patient, much-enduring John, courageous in his pain, he uttered no word of dolour or complaint but rather made light of it all, mocking at his own weakness, dubbing himself "Grandfather," "The hoary Ancient!" and the like, and when strength failed him altogether so that he fell, as was often the case, he would smile up at us from pain-contorted face, to beg our forgiveness on an aged dodderer's tottering limbs and presently be up again to drag his failing body on and on until he would sink down once more and lie to gasp maledictions on his "doddlng legs." At the which times we would sit beside him if we chanced to be sheltered from the sun's heatful glare (and I mighty thankful); or, setting by the two muskets he carried, Japhet would gather him in his arms, swing him to broad shoulder and bear him to rest awhile in the cool shade.

Now to see Japhet stooped thus under him that had been his so hated enemy, to hear poor, fainting John alternate feebly protestant, cursing his weakness and murmuring his gratitude, and Japhet cheerily bidding him to "Belay his jaw-tackle, stow his clack and avast,"—all this so wrought on poor weary me that I forgot my own sick fatigue (or very nearly).

For two days we had tramped thus and John, to my anxious eyes, showing ever feebler, so that although at last Japhet had brought us to an Indian track and our going now much easier, we made but small progress ... a long, long day that is to me now but a blurred memory of suffering ending in night of deathlike slumber.

So came the third day that I am never likely to forget. We had been afoot since dawn and more than once, as we trudged so painfully and slow, I had noticed how keenly Japhet seemed to be listening as for distant sounds and how, often now, when we had laboured up some steep ascent, he would bid us lie and rest whiles he would climb to some point of vantage whence he might look back across the weary miles we had traversed, or stare away at the now distant river lying small and far below us. All this, be sure, waked in me an ever-growing dread, the which I strove to dissemble and yet my Japhet saw for, beckoning me beside him, whiles John took brief rest:

"My dear," says he, pointing me afar, "look now and tell me if you see anything yonder."

"Only this dreadful wilderness!" I sighed. "What should I see?"

"Ay—what!" says he, with sigh like a groan and methought strangely dismal in him.

"Do you mean ... oh, Japhet, are we followed?"

"Do we not expect to be?" says he grimly; then setting arm about me. "Ursula," says he very tenderly, "art valiant soul and mine own trusty comrade, so will I confess, this morning early I thought to see a flash very far off yonder, a flash that came and was gone. Mayhap it was but fancy and I—no, by God, 'tis there again—dost see it?"

"Yes!" I gasped, clinging to him in sudden dread. "Japhet what is it?"

"Steel, my dear, a sword blade or musket barrel. Yonder is Snaith with Rogerson and his rogues to hunt us down."

"Then yonder is death."

"Ay, beyond doubt; except John be suddenly healed, grow him wings, or some other miracle befall."

"Why then," said I, "for such miracle I'll pray."

"Art very fearful, Ursula?"

"Not with you beside me," I answered boldly as I might; but seeing how I trembled, he clasped me a little wildly then held me close in strange, desperate fashion, and having kissed me:

"Come, lass ... sweet valiant comrade, let us march whiles we may."

So on we went again and I now, my weariness whelmed in such affright, yearning to run. Thus trudged we speedily as we might, though poor John's breath laboured painfully and he staggered ever and anon, despite Japhet's ready arm; then all at once he groaned, stumbled and pitched headlong, to lie like one at point of death, for he made no least effort to rise. And looking up at us with haggard eyes, he yet contrived to smile, speaking us in most pitiful gasps:

"Japhet ... here's the end! I'm done! Poor Grandad's legs can wag no more.... And so Japhet for ... your sweet wife's sake waste no more time for me ... off with ye now ... leave me a musket and ... brace of pistols. I'll hold yon roguery in ploy a while and so for Ursula's sake—go, man, go!"

"Go, is it?" quoth Japhet grimly. "Lord love thee, John, Ursula would never leave thee so—'tis plaguery wilful spouse."

Now at this John turns to me, pleading so earnestly that I would be gone that presently seeing all his arguments and passionate entreaties vain, his poor eyes filled with tears and, taking my hand, he kissed it, entreating me still; so that I must needs weep too and kissing his haggard cheek:

"Hush thee now, John," said I, "hush thee like a good child," and so set myself to make him as comfortable as I might.

Now the place where he had fallen was beneath a great rock that jutted out above the track, and in this kindly shade I sat beside him and, having eased him of his belt and cumbrous sword, was minded to bathe his hands and face with some of our precious water, so called to Japhet who carried our water bottle (and so much beside); and presently he answered, but from somewhere high in the air above us; and then he hails again, crying very joyfully:

"Ursula, Ursula, by heaven, here's your miracle!"

"Where?" cried I, starting to my feet. "Oh, where?"

"Bide a moment and you shall see." So back he comes, leads me out from the shade of this great rock and, turning aside from the track, shows me how this same huge crag towered mightily aloft, all clothed and clinged about by bush and flowering vines to the very summit, amid which trickled a little pretty fall of water right pleasant to see; and now, pushing in amid these bushes, he begins to climb, bidding me follow. So up I clambered easily enough and coming thus upon the very summit of this great rock, beheld a small green plateau that trended down to a little cave and hard beside this, upwelling from the rock itself, a bubbling spring.

"So here's your miracle, sweetheart!" saith he, glad-eyed as any care-free boy. "A cave to shelter us, abundance of sweet water and a sure defence. Here's stronghold whence we may command the country round about, a place we may defend 'gainst any odds till the crack o' doom—or our food be done. So—item food ... flesh and fruits and plenty on't. But first to get Johnny up aloft here...."

So down went we forthwith to tell of this God-sent refuge to John who, instantly protesting himself able, got to his legs and would have fallen but for our help. None the less he must essay the climb and, with desperate effort, achieved the summit at last, only to sink half swooning in Japhet's arms. But the sweet water revived him and when Japhet had washed and dressed his hurt he must sit near by while we set about clearing the little cave and making it habitable. This done, we took stock of our resources and found them to be these; to wit:

A constant supply of spring water.

Enough meat (buccanned) to last us three days; but as Japhet said, great plenty of fruits, as ocas, wild grapes, ananas and the like, growing everywhere around us.

To our defence and further comfort:

- 2 swords.
- 2 muskets.
- 4 pistols.
- 104 bullets (assorted) in a bag.
- 3 powder horns (replete).
- 2 long belt knives.
- 1 tinder box.
- 1 gold-handled penknife (this I claimed and have now, since as hath been told it was the means, through John, of our escape).
- 1 small looking glass in a case (very battered).
- 1 ivory comb.
- 1 small brush for the teeth.
- 3 needles with hank of thread and a sailor's palm.
- A length of small cord.

A vast treasure of gems (and no manner of use to us).

These last mine and I very glad I had not thrown them away as often tempted so to do.

These, then, were all our worldly possessions and we three poor fugitives mightly content therewith; but indeed, to lie thus at ease so hidden and secure, we were all uplift and wondrous cheerful, and in my heart infinite gratitude to that merciful God had proved our saviour so often of late.

"Well," says Japhet, lying outstretched beside John in cool shadow of the little cave, "here are we, God be thanked!"

"Amen!" sighed John fervently. "And now what, Japhet?"

"Here shall we remain till Barnabas and our good comrades come to our relief."

"How shall they find us in this vastness?"

"I shall signal them with smoke."

"'Tis marvellous hiding place, Japhet; yon rogues shall pass by—ay, verily beneath us, all unsuspecting."

"True enough, John, except they have Indians to track us."

"Well and how then?"

"We must fight. For these Indians being wild creatures, Johnny, have senses strung to finer pitch than ours ... the faintest smudge or reek o' smoke, a broken twig, a stone newly displaced and 'tis enough." Here was silence a while and we lying in a sweet beatitude of drowsiness, all three.

"I'm wondering," says John suddenly, "pray, Japhet, how many Indians fought for you in those deadly night attacks on Snaith's company?"

"A notable warrior, once a chief, called Caripuna."

"Eh—one man Japhet ... one only, sayst thou?"

"But this same one right cunning in Indian strategy, John, and marvellous war-wise."

"Why then, Japhet, with one man shouldst defy all attacks on such place as this, ay, even though this man be no better than hoary patriarch or feeble as doddlish granddad."

"Ay," says Japhet, getting afoot with joyous laugh. "I'll warrant us, John—thou and I." Now at this, I saw John's pale cheek flush and his eyes shine as he gazed where stood Japhet busied repriming his musket.

"What now, Japhet?" I enquired.

"I'm off a-hunting to fill the pot, lass, or at the least gather store of fruits to add to our stock, for we were wise to fit us 'gainst a siege. Do you light a fire and cook supper against my return."

"A fire? But 'twill be seen."

"Not in this sheltered hollow, comrade. Besides, Snaith and his rogues are too far away to trouble us this twelve hours, I judge. So to it, lass, and with a will—a stew—ha? For zounds, ma'm, I'm famished, and so art thou and Johnny, or should be." So saying, he slung his musket about him, waved his hand to us and vanished down the steep.

Now whiles I busied myself about these duties, when John begged he might aid me, I bade him lie still and talk to me instead; and so we held communion on this wise:

JOHN: Well, Ursula, of late I have thought of myself as so much better dead, and this for divers reasons, that last night judging you and Japhet asleep, I would have rid you of my useless self and myself of this growing irksomeness called "life." But Japhet saw—the fellow must sleep with eyes and ears wide—reft from me the pistol and put me on my honour (mark that!) to endure my allotted span. So do I live—

MYSELF: Thank God!

JOHN: Nay, my dear soul, why such passion of gratitude? For, according to all rules canonic and ideas of justice romantical, I should have died repentant, with you to weep and Japhet to forgive. Or, better still, I should have made my final exodus out yonder, in fight against innumerable foes, passing to my account with flourish heroical,—yes, faith, this had been purely romantic—

MYSELF: Nay, John my dear, do not mock; thou art surely preserved thus alive to some good purpose.

JOHN: Ay, child, but—to what? The Almighty and Japhet alone do know.

MYSELF: And Japhet is changed, John, changed as greatly as you and I.

JOHN: Am I indeed so changed?

MYSELF: Oh, beyond belief; so are you henceforth my best-loved friend. Truly we are all of us changed, John, and no wonder, for here in the perils and hardships of this wild and cruel land, the Lord hath revealed Himself in the power of His might and infinite mercy, and I think hath touched our hearts, mine own at least.

Thus we talked until night was at hand and I growing anxious for Japhet, when we heard his cheery hail and, peeping down from our eyrie, I saw him heavy laden from his hunting.

"Heave me the line, messmate!" says he; the which I did.

"Now haul away!" cried he and I obeying, up came three birds he had shot, two of them very large; and after these a small pig, so very smooth and pink it daunted me; but as he told me, cut in strips and cured in the sun, here was meat should last us our needs, or thereabout.

Supper done, he brings me where, from our lofty haven, we might look across this vast expanse of country that stretched away and away, a dim-seen mystery, for the moon had not risen as yet; suddenly as my baffled gaze swept this wide emptiness, I espied a red spark, another and then another, and knowing these for our pursuers' watchfires, stole my hand into Japhet's firm clasp.

"They are a great way off," said I.

"Ay, but to-morrow," says he, lifting my hand to kiss it, "you shall see them as far below us or ... twinkling all about us ... but my dearest, however it be, I thank God for your sweet, strong faith and power of prayer. Come now, get thee to bed, messmate, and—forget not thy prayers."

And this night, lying within our little cave where I might see the glory of stars and hear the drowsy murmurs of Japhet and John to one another, despite this threat of shameful horror and death that was to come down upon us on the morrow, I knew the bliss of sweet and dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER LI

HOW WITH THE THREAT OF DEATH CAME GREAT JOY

All next morning we were busied, I about my house-wifely duties, Japhet and John with the cutting up and curing of their meat, etc. And here I must needs set down how that, labouring thus, I felt a strange, new gladness, for there was about this refuge of ours such feeling of home, such sense of sweet intimacy and peace (after all our dangers past) that (and despite all dangers to come) my heart was marvellous uplift; also I heard Japhet, once or twice, fall a-singing his song of Yo-ho, and methought more blithely than ever before.

Having despatched their business with the meat, he and John went to and fro about our small demesne, talking and arguing together and taking further means to our defence.

"Though faith, Johnny man," says he cheerily, "we can do no more than Nature hath already. For, lookee, we can be secure from their shot, and they can assail us but at two points, here by this rift above the path and yonder by the spring. At none other place is any foothold or chance of escalade, d'ye see—no, not even for an Indian, if Indians they have, which God forbid."

Thus passed the morning of this so fateful day.

So came high noon and dinner, whereafter Japhet brings me into a sheltered nook he called his armoury and here showed me how to charge, ram and prime musket and pistol. And now it was that John called to us softly, whence he stood watching the path; so to him sped we, my poor heart beating double time, though indeed no eyes could possibly espy us on this eminence (except eyes of bird) for the kindly rock itself made us a natural rampire all round about and this thick grown with tangled vines.

A steely glitter amid the boskage afar ... another and another. A vague stir like gentlest wind amid leaves.

"Well," says Japhet, and I wondered to hear his voice so untroubled, "yonder they come, Johnny man; art ready for 'em?"

"Never doubt me, Japhet."

"I don't, John, I don't! Though if it come to fighting, how you can use that shoulder passes me."

"I'll contrive if needs must."

"To be sure, we've reduced the inflammation, John; it should be easier—ha?"

"It is. Thou'rt no mean surgeon, Japhet."

"And thou'rt mighty responsive patient." Thus talked they while that vague stir grew to hoarse, unlovely murmur.

Flash and flicker much nearer now and yet advancing so very leisurely I wished with every throb of my heart they might hurry and our dreadful suspense be the sooner ended.

"Stir not," said Japhet softly, "nor so much as cock musket, Johnny, till needs must. The question now being—is there aught to betray us, or shall they march on all unsuspecting? See how the crass fools straggle! Ha, damme, but with twenty such as Caripuna, we might scatter and drive 'em to the devil!"

Jingle and clash with muffled tramp of many feet.... A hoarse droning ... a harsh mutter swelling nearer, louder, shouts, laughter, a snatch of song, a waxing hubbub.

And now we beheld them, a wild, unordered company, white, yellow and black, ragged and travel-worn or dight in tarnished finery. On they came up the narrow steep ascent towards us, a fierce company weary and spent with hard going, with dreadful babblement of breathless cursing. And foremost of all, one arm in a sling, his comely, evil face swathed in bloody clout, strode Captain Snaith and beside him a swart, squat man in wide-eaved feathered hat, a plump man who scowled and panted bitter invective.

"I say a curse o' this plaguey land travel, Roger! I say we'm out of our natural element, by Satan! We should ha' kept to

the river and my boats, damme, 'stead o' this hell-fire labour o' marching,—"

"You was ever a thick-pated fool, Rogerson my hearty!" retorted Snaith in his clear, ringing tones. "How, i' the fiend's name, shall we achieve that we would except we come up with Japhet? Damn him! And how come up with him by water and he ashore, my poor lob-lolly lad and be damned?"

"Well, heave to, Roger, bring up in shade o' this rock. Ahoy, bosun, pipe down." So saying, Rogerson and Snaith, with such of their fellows as might, got them out of the heat into the shadow of our rock and though we could thus see nothing of them, the hoarse mutter of their voices came up to us.

Now all this time I had been counting these men as they advanced and had already told seventy-nine when Japhet's touch arrested me and glancing whither he directed, I saw, flitting amid these dense boskages to right and left of the path, feathered heads and stealthy shapes of Indian warriors; I caught but a glimpse of them ere they vanished amid the thickets and, look how I would, saw no more of them, which put me in great hope Japhet's estimate of their powers might prove wrong.

But now our enemies, halted thus, lay sprawled wearily, and all about us the lewd clamour of them troubling the reverent hush of these primeval solitudes most vilely. For some half hour as I guess (and this for me a seeming eternity) they lay thus beneath and all around our refuge; then a pipe shrilled, hoarse voices commanded, other voices shouted and cursed, as with clash and jingle they mustered themselves and tramped heavily on their way, and I watching them in joyous relief until the forest had hidden the last of them. So I turned and stood appalled to see a tall Indian come leaping at us, brandishing an axe; then Japhet, knife in hand, had met him and, avoiding the axe's glittering sweep, closed with him. But as they swayed fast grappled, from the Indian's throat rose that same terrible, wavering battle scream that ended in dreadful choking and he was down; then, o'erleaping his antagonist's still form, Japhet was crouching at that point of danger beside the bubbling spring and now, instead of knife, he grasped levelled pistol, for the dead Indian's battle cry had been taken up by other such outcries from below that shrilled upon the air all about me.

"Well, John, here's battle and sudden death!" cried Japhet. "So aim true, Johnny, and aim low—" even as he spoke, his pistol gushed flame and smoke, above which I glimpsed the contorted face of an Indian that vanished as I looked. And now John's musket roared beside me and to us came Japhet, very cheerfully serene to peer down over our rampire (whereupon an arrow whizzed up past his head) and to clap John upon the back.

"John," says he, "so long as we ha' strength to wield sword or pull trigger, no man may reach us here and live."

"But the Indian," says I, "by the spring—"

"Ay, faith, dear soul, there fool Japhet was like to ha' failed thee; 'twas right damnable! I should have been on my post wary as John here."

"But, Japhet, it is so easy to climb."

"True enough, but no man may climb such steep and climbing fight. Howbeit, I might contrive to close and secure it somewhat."

So saying, he goeth where lies his dead Indian and dragging the body to that water-worn crevice, begins to wedge it therein very horridly, so that I turned my back and taking up his discharged pistol, began to reload it. In the midst of this business, I was alarmed by such ferocious outcries, such jubilant cheering and triumphant fierce halloo, my poor hands so shook I could scarce hold the pistol; perceiving which, down sat Japhet to do this for me.

"Courage, lass," says he; "yon rogues shall pipe different tune anon. And oh, Ma'm Bly," says he, murmuring, "if we win safe out o' this,—as we shall, thy poor, meek Japhet shall so kiss thee, that vivid mouth, thy deep, shy-sweet eyes, the smooth, soft whiteness of thee, he shall forget all his meekness and humility awhile and teach thee thou'rt no more than merest Ma'm Bly. So think on this and 'stead of trembling at yon howling roguery, shiver for thy future self and Japhet, Madam Bly!" While thus he spoke, the fearsome uproar had been growing louder and now was added the rapid explosions of muskets and in the air above us the hiss and whine of their shot. Then Japhet was afoot and, standing shoulder to shoulder with John, they together began shooting in reply, first their long muskets (that I must instantly recharge) then their four pistols, and all with terrible effect, judging from the dire sounds that reached me from below; for now I was too busy with powder and bullets to so much as steal a look or wish so to do.

"See you aught o' Snaith, John?"

"Not a sign."

"Nor I, damn him! How many Indians have you reckoned?"

"No more than five or six."

"Ay, so I judge—"

"Aloft there!" roared a voice from below, and now the clamour subsiding, I heard the rich, clear voice of Captain Snaith hailing:

"Japhet—ahoy! A parley ere we begin, a parley, Japhet!"

"Snaith," cried he in fierce answer, "you shall parley with the devil ere all's done."

"Japhet, old messmate, we offer ye quarters; here's terms, Japhet. Heave us down that you wot of, that same you stole from me—heave it to us, old shipmate, and we'll cry quits, ay—we'll up and stand away incontinent, and this we swear. How say ye, Japhet?"

Now here and before he might answer, I cried on Japhet bidding, nay, entreating him to cast down the jewels and be done with them, since they were fouled with blood and could do us no manner of good. "So yield them for all our sakes, Japhet!" says I.

"Not I!" he answered very harshly. "Lord, ma'm, are ye fool so deluded to think such vile fellow would keep faith? And, what's more, beside these gems 'tis yourself he covets and my life—"

"Aloft there! Japhet, what's your answer?"

"This!" cried Japhet, discharging his musket; and almost immediately John did likewise.

"And there's two more, Johnny, the which is sweet shooting!"

And thus commenced a battle, these two against the many, a conflict beyond my power to describe (even if I would) for it is but a confused and hateful memory, a horror of blood and wounds, the dolorous cries of death-smitten men, of heart-breaking suspense, sudden alarms and wild alternations of hope, fear and growing despair. Time and again they assailed the many against the two, striving desperately to clamber up to us, only to go tumbling back before the deadly thrust of Japhet's sword and John's blasting fire, so that towards sunset their fury of effort languished, their firing dwindled, ceased, and so came peace a while, and most blessed respite for us poor fugitives. So down sat we to supper, but John and I so weary we might scarce eat; and looking from his pale, comely face all smudged and blackened with powder, to Japhet most dreadfully stained and spotted, I trembled and wondered to see them yet alive and all unharmed, as I told them.

"Why, faith," says Japhet, shading his eyes to gaze on the distant prospect, "we have proved our stronghold impregnable so far, thank God. But soon it will be night—" Here he rose and began pacing to and fro, his keen gaze now here, now there, now on the far distance again. "Ay, night," he repeated, "and with darkness they shall attempt us again and desperately ... no rest for us; 'twill be shot and steel all night long, Johnny."

"Well," saith John, making his voice very cheerful, "we shall be ready."

"We must, John, we must. So now, while we may, have at that wound o' thine." Saying which, and despite John's protests, he sets about the business, frowning and shaking his head to see John's poor shoulder so angry and inflamed. "Well, 'tis your left arm," says he, his deft fingers dressing and rebandaging (and methought very gently); "use this same arm little as possible or we shall have thee down with fever. Lie you and rest, Johnny, sleep if you can against what's to do this night, with a curse!"

"But, Japhet, 'fore heaven, I'm very well."

"Yet more so i' the cave—come, down with thee!"

Having settled John at ease in the cave, he begins to pace back and forth again, pausing so often to stare on that same vasty distance that I questioned him at last:

"My dear, what do you look for?"

"Barnaby and our comrades or their smoke signals," he answered, passing hand across his furrowed brow with a weary gesture.

"Yea, but," said I, watching his poor, haggard face, "if your brave Caripuna never won to Bartlemy's Bay, our friends may never come, or reach us too late. Is this your thought, Japhet?"

Now at this, he was silent, glancing round about him in desperate sort and with looks very woefully troubled.

"Oh, my dear," said I, slipping my hand within his arm, "hide nothing of your trouble from me any more; I am beyond such thing as fear. So tell me all your care that I may help you bear it, as true comrade should."

"Well," says he, in strange, muffled tone and keeping his face averted, "by my reckoning, if Caripuna ever reached the coast, our friends should have been in sight or hereabouts—yesterday morning."

"And so, Japhet, if Caripuna died before he could bring news of us, you are as sure as I am that here we must die too. And this is your trouble, poor man." Here he turned to look on me very wildly.

"Ay, it is! And may God forgive me!" he answered in groaning voice, and in his eyes such agonizing despair I yearned to kiss and comfort him but could not yet awhile.

"Well then, Japhet," said I, stealing my hand down into his, "if we must die here soon or late, which I do think most like and little grieve for, and naught to trouble us for a little space, is there naught you have to tell me?"

"So much," he murmured brokenly, "so very much I ... I can find no words...."

"Then let your heart speak me, Japhet!"

And in breathless, choking voice speak me he did:

"I love you, Ursula ... almost from the first I loved you, but now ... ah, God ... 'tis grown so great I may never tell! And now to die ... in death to lose each other ... this, this is my agony, Beloved ... I that do so love thee ... have brought thee here ... to die...."

This and much beside he told me, words my ears of late had hungered for; and now, with death so nigh upon us, I could think only how fast his dear arms held me and how leapt my heart to the deep, strong beat of his. Mute awhile, we clung together in such strange rapture as went far beyond mere speech or even kisses.

"Oh, Japhet," said I at last, "my faith is this: that though indeed we die, for us can be no parting; in death we shall find each other because this love of ours is of heaven as well as earth and so may live for ever. So do not let us grieve—"

But now the dear soul must kneel to me, his face so transfigured and on his lips words I may never write but that are for me a memory sacred beyond the telling.

So ended this day, and standing side by side we watched the great sun go down in glory, this sun that with our mortal eyes we might never see again; and with this thought in our hearts we clasped and clung and kissed. And so came night.

CHAPTER LII

TELLETH HOW HELP CAME TO US

It was a stilly night, with no least breath of wind and very dark, for the moon, said Japhet, would not be up for an hour or more.

Now as I walked with him to and fro on his ward (both of us silent now that our ears might the better warn us), we went in such sweet communion that, maugre the dark that menaced us with unseen, creeping dangers and the long night that instead of blessed sleep was to bring us turmoil, peril and mayhap sharp death, I say despite all this, I went with mind serene and undismayed, since in my heart was that which cast out fear and made me resolute to endure unflinching whatsoever should betide us.

In the woods below we could see the flare of our besiegers' camp fires where vague shapes moved and whence came ceaseless stir and hubbub; but as we stood gazing down thus side by side, up went Japhet's head in that staglike fashion of his and he questioned me, whispering:

"Dost hear aught?"

"No!" I murmured: so he brings me nearer the spring and then above its soft bubbling I heard that which chilled me, a dreadful, stealthy rustling, a soft scrambling and I saw the dull gleam of Japhet's quick-drawn sword.

"Go you and warn John!" he whispered. Noiseless I sped to the cave and breathing John's name, reached forth in the dark to touch him; but or ever I might do so, he was afoot, had caught up his musket and crouched for action.

Ensued a moment of breathless suspense. Then was ghastly flurry of movement where Japhet fought, and a wild, screeching cry drowned in the bellowing report of John's musket and instantly the night was hideous with uproar of battle, desperate fury of attack and grimly resolute defence, waves of fight that rolled up, were beaten back and lulled a while.

"Hot work, Johnny, hot work! Is all ... well with thee?" gasped Japhet, in one of these intervals. "Art well, John?"

"As flowers—of the May—" answered breathless John and very blithely, but as I reached for his musket to recharge it, he sank to his knees; so bringing water, I gave him to drink and bathed his face and head, and he so humbly grateful therefor, I could have wept.

And now our first misfortune befell, for as I reloaded his musket, what with the dark and my trembling haste, I fumbled the powder horn, spilling broadcast much of our precious powder.

Up rose the moon at last and with it our second and far greater misfortune, for as I turned to look at Japhet, I saw him lean out from the parapet to take aim, then stagger back, his arm transfixed by an Indian arrow, whereat I ran to aid him, crying I know not what.

"Easy, dear lass, easy!" says he, seeming nowise dismayed ... "Stand by to snap off the barb." So, blenching for the pain I must cause him, I grasped the shaft as he showed me and contrived to break away the cruel barb, then, sweating with the anguish, he drew forth the shaft and tossed it away. "Now, a handful o' moss to clap athwart it ... a strip o' my shirt to secure it. So—well and good! Never look so tragic, sweetheart; this came of my own heedlessness and it might have been a musket ball through my fool's head. Now go you and watch our Johnny lest he swoon again."

Since all things must have an end, so passed this age-long night until was glimmer of dawn and I so spent with fatigue I might scarce stand or go. Now presently, glancing down at our assailants, my heart failed me at last and I cried in dismay to see they had felled and lopped a great tree and now, with ropes and tackle and many hands, were endeavouring to rear it up against this rock of our defence, whereby they might come up and assault us at yet another point. Now looking from haggard, blood-smear'd Japhet to haggard, much-enduring John, I read for a moment on the face of each such despair as almost matched mine own.

"Well, Johnny man, well," says Japhet hoarsely and avoiding my gaze, "being only mortal, thou and I, we can do no more than poor humans may ... and what's more, Johnny, our powder is nigh spent ... enough to withstand every assault for—

another hour or thereabouts, I reckon and then, John ... a bullet apiece. Is't understood, comrade?"

"Very clearly, Japhet ... yes, cousin ... it is the only and ... very proper end for us," croaked John.

"Ay, faith! Well, 'twas good fight, John and thou a ... notable good comrade ... stout o' heart, d'ye see.... And death might come in worse shape, eh, Johnny?"

"Verily and indeed, Japhet; for if death bring rest and blessed sleep after such long night and fitful fever, it shall be kindly welcome.... But see, Japhet, the rogues muster out of range for another attack!"

"Ay, I see, John. Soon we shall be harder at it than ever and may not find a chance to speak to each other again. So, John, now will I tell thee ... had we won safe out o' this, it was my intent to—but no matter, what I would say is this—" here he was silent a moment, fidgeting and fumbling with his sword and when he spoke again it was in manner very halting:

"Johnny man ... cousin John, hast proved thyself at the last such ... very man, such spirit as ... I might have honoured ... hast wiped out all past ills ... and so ... ha, damme, John man, give me thy fist."

So they took and gripped each other's hands and both alike dumb now, for when John strove to speak, the words seemed to choke him; and seeing how his poor face was all lined with his tears, though he still looked on Japhet and kept fast hold of his hand, I turned away to watch the dayspring. But as I gazed upon this ever-brightening dawn, I saw that which bowed me to my knees in very ecstasy of gratitude, so that for a moment I might utter no sound, then:

"Japhet!" I cried, sobbing and laughing like any poor mad wretch, "Oh, John—look!" And I pointed them where, plain to see against the waxing splendour of dawn, dark specks were going up to heaven that I knew for puffs of smoke. "John ... oh, my Japhet!" cried I, reaching out a hand to each of them, "Come—come and kneel to the God of our salvation!"

So we knelt three, side by side, gazing towards this promise of life until these radiant heavens swam upon my failing sight, grew dim and dimmer to an all engulfing blackness.

CHAPTER LIII

WHICH SHOWETH HOW I FELL TO STRANGE DREAM, AND WAKING DO HERE END MY NARRATIVE

The bright sun was high risen when I waked to find myself lying in the cave and very content to be there, for my head throbbed painfully and an unwonted languor thrall'd me. But now I became aware that voices yet shouted in fierce halloo and, starting feebly to an elbow in sick alarm, I saw John outstretched near by, looking at me with eyes very large and strangely soft in the pale oval of his poor thin face; but now and ere I might speak, the uproar without swelled to such clamour of horrid yells that I would have risen in growing panic.

"Oh, John," I gasped, "do they fight again and Japhet all alone?"

"No, no," he answered feebly, "content you, Ursula; yonder hideous ferocity of shouting is verily Friendship's roar; our deliverers are come at last. And thy Japhet was here a while since to tend me and hang over thee, and himself I'll vow in scarce better case than either of us. He went but to signal his friends. Go you out to him." Here I made to rise but found this such labour as perfectly astonished me.

"Oh, John," sighed I, clasping my head, "I am very strangely weak!"

"And small wonder, my dear, considering all you have endured. Faith, 'tis marvel you are no worse."

"Was I long aswoon?"

"Three hours about. Take heed now lest you swoon again."

Getting with prodigious effort to my unwilling legs that seemed other than mine own, I tottered forth into the sun glare and very nearly tripped over Japhet, him outsprawled in sleep very like a swoon, his poor face on the hard ground. So down sank I, be sure, and with no little effort contrived to lift and pillow his weary head upon my lap and he, in his deathlike slumber, all unconscious of it.

Now having him thus, I could not but touch his touzled hair and smooth his lean cheek, all spiky with bristly beard; whereat he groaned, snored, opened his eyes and smiled up at me.

"My dear," said I bending to him anxiously, "oh, my dear, how are you?"

"Very near to heaven!" he sighed. "Faint was I, ma'm, feeble, famished and all foredone—yet now mightily content. Yea, here lieth poor Japhet very nigh to paradise,—well now, doth it anyways pleasure thee to have him so?"

"Can you doubt it, Japhet?"

"Nay, but," says he in his dogged fashion, "is thy pleasure little or great (here he snuggles his head the closer); art thou but calmly content or doth thy heart swell, thy pulse leap, thy sweet breath wax short and all thy tender loveliness thrill and shiver and glow for very happiness of it? Ay, lass, by heaven, it verily doth."

"Oh!" says I, avoiding his eyes. "And how are you so hatefully sure of all this?"

"Woman, I see, hear, feel and sense it! At this moment and here in this savage wild, being no more than merest woman, thy soul unfettered and far from the world of conscious make-believe, thou art verily over those dainty ears in love with thy Japhet, yearning to him, passioning for him as tender spouse should. And deny this if you can, Ma'm Bly." At this I merely twisted the wretch's hair until he moaned for it.

"But," he went on, when I had freed him, "how, ma'm, how when, lapped again in ease and safety, you shall be no more than your own niminy-piminy, mock-modest, purely-prudish fine-ladylike self,—how then?"

"Lord!" quoth I. "What a mouthful of verbose futility! It is fool question, for how, my poor silly man, how may I ever be again my own self, when this same self is become, and becoming ever more so, your very own—" Here, quite forgetting to be faint or feeble, up he sits to clasp and cradle me across his knees.

"Ursula?" says he, and then in very tender whisper, "wife?"

Now when he spake (and so reverently) this word I had scarce ever heard from his lips before, I cried out for pure gladness and twining my arms about his neck, drew down this dear, hawk face (so marvellous tender now) to kiss and kiss it in despite of its sharp bristle of beard; but when I would have spoken more, my words were lost in sudden, jubilant clamour from below.

"Japhet, ahoy! What Japhet man!"

"Oho, Cap'n, aloft there! Us be thy lads o' the old *Deliverance*! Cap'n ahoy!"

So we arose and I, leaning from the cave, heard Japhet hailing in reply. Then up came they clambering, one after another, but first of them all Barnabas, showing more gigantic than ever in this small space. And glad was I to see how they grasped and wrung each other's hands and hugged and laughed and smote each other.

"How now, Barnaby, what o' the fight yonder?"

"Sharpish a while, Japhet; we've nine good fellows dead, poor Sol Troy among 'em, alas! And old Lovepeace sore smitten and others too."

"And Ezekiel—what of Zeke?"

"In the very thick on't as usual and all untouched."

"And Snaith?"

"Duly tried and hanged along with Rogerson!"

"And this was Ezekiel's doing, I'll warrant!"

"Ay, Japhet, it was so. Zeke was their chief accuser, judge and hangman. I left him praying very earnestly for their souls' salvation. A strange man is our Zeke. But how of her ... Ursula?" At this I stepped from the cave, whereat came Barnabas quick-striding to set his great arms about me and kiss me heartily, like the good friend he was. And then appeared Ezekiel himself, but so pale and dreadfully bespattered I thought indeed he must be hurt and cried out to know.

"Nay, daughter," he answered in his sweet voice, "this is but the blood of expiation; many of the unrighteous shall sin no more for mighty is Jehovah—alleluia! Touch me not till I be purified." Nevertheless I ran to him and his arms outstretched to welcome me, but, even then, I tripped, fell headlong and crying with sharp pain, was plunged once more into a dark forgetfulness.

Yet presently I fell a-dreaming of many things, a strange dream wherein I heard voices and had visions amany, though oftenest of Japhet's face, now very near me, now growing smaller, vague and dreadfully far, and I, mightily distressed therefor, calling and beseeching him to come back, striving to speak all my great love for him and weeping because it seemed he could nowise hear me. I dreamed also of little Doctor Crabtree's one eye glaring on me very balefully; I had dread visions of trees and dead men that dangled in hideous fashion. I was aware of hands that touched and arms that clasped me. Also in my dreaming were voices sometimes terribly loud and painful to hear, then dying suddenly to far-off whisper.

"Will she live, Crabtree, will she live?"

"We can hope, Japhet, ay, hope or demme! Our heart is strong ... our body sweetly sound but mere temple of emptiness ... our mind is away, flown off, lost in the infinite...."

"Then if she die, Crabtree, I'll follow her; ay, by God—'tis good-bye life, with all my heart."

Japhet's face, and so agonized! I sought desperately to comfort him though all in vain, for he could not hear ... the single sharp eye of Doctor Crabtree peering at me.... The mighty form of Barnabas.... John's voice crying on me in the dark:

"Ursula, Ursula, my love goeth with thee.... Oh, Ursula, come you back, my dear, back to sweet life and thy Japhet, Ursula, come back!"

Sun and shadow. Gloom of forests. Glow of fires. The sea at last, and ships, one very tall and stately, brave with new paint and gilding that I knew for the *Deliverance*.... Deborah wringing her hands and wailing over me and spattering my face with her so-plenteous tears.... A feather bed ... cool, fragrant sheets.... Carved and gilded beams above me and a great lanthorn ... and now all about me a peace ineffable.

Sunlight. Lamplight. Darkness and glory of sun and I crouched thus 'twixt death and life, awake and yet thrall'd in sleep until upon a day Deborah, brushing my hair as was her wont morning and night, let fall the heavy brush that smote down upon my poor head and, roused by the shock and sudden pain of it, up I started from my pillows to berate her, whereat she stared down on me as I had been a ghost.

"Oh, Deborah!" cried I, and knowing my long dream was ended at last, reached forth my arms to her, "Oh, Deborah, you have awaked me! Oh—let me kiss thee—"

But instead she gasps, screams out and runs sobbing from the cabin. Then I heard quick speeding steps and Japhet was beside me on his knees, his arms about me, his face hid against me and for a long moment both of us speechless. At last, feeling his arms so fast about me, I bade him take heed to his wound; whereat, folding me closer and keeping his face yet hidden, he laughed, though very shakily.

"So, ma'm," says he, lifting his head to look on me, "so, ma'm, you've thought better on 't, choosing rather the woes o' wedlock than the persuasive peace of death ... back to thy husband's arms like dutiful wife, to essay thy Japhet and make the best of him?"

Now, though he strove to be light, he looked on me through sparkle of tears that I instantly set myself to kiss away, and thus we were silent again. And then, before we might speak, in sped Doctor Crabtree, wig awry and coat skirts flying, to feel my pulse, gaze on the hair brush, examine my head, shake his own and exclaim:

"Demme! For nine days, mem, you have lain in a strange inappetency, a *vis inertia*, an imperturbation of spirits."

"And now am myself again!" cried I, nestling to Japhet's arm, "and yearning to be on deck again and feel the glad wind —"

"Why, so ye shall in a day or so, or demme!"

"A day or so!" quoth I indignantly; then was knock on the door and in came these friends had grown so dear to me and foremost old Lovepeace, limping on Ezekiel's arm, and all so rejoiced to see me well again I scarce might behold them for my happy, grateful tears. Scarce were they gone than out of bed leapt I, only to sink into Deborah's ready clasp by reason of my poor feeble legs; so back to bed went I forthwith.

And presently, news of my recovery spreading among the company, what must these kindly souls do but commence to fiddle and sing and come aft in a body to cheer me, until I sent Deborah (and the vain thing in her prettiest cap and apron) to thank them.

Now because of the heat, they had made me a bed hard beside that little window the which (as I have told) opened upon the deck and this night, lying there full of happy thoughts, I heard feet go pacing slowly to and fro and two of these—feet that I should have known in a thousand. And with these slow footsteps were voices plain to hear, for the *Deliverance* rode at her anchors and all very hushed and still.

"Japhet, I cannot do it, I will not. For in defrauding you still of your heritage, I defraud Ursula also. She is your Countess and—"

"No, Johnny man, she is my—wife! And I hope and dare to think she may be content with no higher title. So you will sail in Stukeley's ship yonder—back to England."

"England, Japhet! The England she hath so longed, so yearned after."

"Ha, damme, but that's true enough, John. I do think she loves old England best in all the world. Well, 'tis England or me, John, she must choose."

"'Tis cruel choice, I think, Japhet man. Why not return and enjoy your own—?"

"For divers and sufficing reasons, Johnny. And besides, you are more truly earl-like earl and more courtly fine gentleman than I should ever be. And moreover, my mind is quite determined on't. With this treasure of gems, we shall do well enough, she and I—except her choice be England!"

"And then, Japhet?"

"She may take the treasure and go. Come, let us turn in."

"But, Japhet, if she choose England,—what of yourself?"

"Well, there's the sea, Johnny man; there's ever and always the sea, God be thanked." Then hearing how they went together, walking slowly and in such amity, I smiled upon the dark.

All next day was great bustle and to-do by reason of Captain Stukeley's imminent departure, with Japhet and most of our people busied in their camp on shore or in Captain Stukeley's ship *Falcon*, a noble vessel that lay anchored hard by us.

In the afternoon I got me up on deck for the first time and glad to see our own splendid ship so neat and trim. But hardly was I on this lofty poop than I was greeted by such cheer as set my heart athrob and presently brought Japhet hasting up to me; but such very stately gentleman in his velvets and laces and a great periwig that methought set off his comely face to admiration.

Taking my hand, he brings me to the rail and gestures towards the *Falcon*.

"Ursula, ere nightfall Stukeley's ship yonder stands away for England."

"My beloved England!" said I, sighing. "Oh, for the sweet security, the comforts and sanity of my England. 'Twas there you vowed and promised to bring me safe again."

"Ay, ma'm, and you've but to say the word. Stukeley's a prime seaman, his *Falcon* a stout ship, and you'll have our Johnny for company."

"John?" quoth I, as vastly astonished.

"The same, ma'm, John Christopher, Earl of Aldbourne—"

"But you are the Earl!"

"No, I'm Captain Japhet Bly of the *Deliverance*, poor Japhet that wed him a wife hath been no wife nor ever shall, except she so desire,—ay, and with such desire shall make her forego ease, comfort, pride o' rank and all else in this world save—poor Japhet. And what says you to this?"

"That you offer me no choice."

"Why, true it is very hard choice, the easeful security of your England 'gainst peril of seas and chance of wind with this same Japhet."

"Oh!" said I. "Silly man, here can be no possible choice for any poor soul such as I that yearns and wearies to ... come home at last."

"Home?" he questioned, leaning nearer. "Home? Oh, my dear—?"

"Indeed," I answered gently, "long time since, it seems, I heard one say, and in fashion most assured, Japhet, that a wife's proper home was in the arms of her husband ... though not here, thou loved, impatient man! Not on this lofty deck, where all or any may see ... besides, yonder is John—!"

And John had seen, for being come up to us, he reached forth his hand, smiling very wistfully.

"I do but come to take my leave," said he, looking from Japhet's face to mine (and my cheeks all aflush), "to bid you farewell and wish you joy ... and all that ... such as I may wish for ... such as you." Thus for a moment he gazed on us, then turning very suddenly, hasted away or ever I might speak; and presently we saw him being rowed across to the *Falcon* and though he waved his hand in farewell, he never once looked back.

"There goeth ... noble gentleman!" said I.

"Ay, true," nodded Japhet, "the man John that gave us back to life and to each other ... so needs must I ... love our Johnny!"

After this we were silent again, the night very dark about us for, being in harbour, the great stern lanterns were unlighted, and all about us a wide solitude. And then Japhet's voice, hushed and wonderfully tender:

"Well, Madam Bly, it seems this wind of Fortune or Destiny hath blown to some purpose for ... here's you and me in empty-seeming world.... Comrades in storm and stress that have looked Death in the eye ... man and woman ... husband and wife that have scarce ever kissed as yet."

"No, Japhet, because I was weak and at thy mercy and thou very strong ... very patient and ... my Japhet."

"But now," says he, as I had not spoken, "this, as I think, might and should be amended,—how say you?"

"That I am here, Japhet, very meekly submissive and ... oh, my dear, how I do love thee!"

"Glory!" he whispered, and catching me up, bare me away whither he would.

Now here, as I think, my narrative truly ends, for here have I writ down all that I set out to tell (and at inordinate length).

But because the years have proved so kind to me, I am fain to add unto these so many words others yet—a few.

Through the open lattice, whereby I sit writing the end of my narration, I may behold this fair English garden and beyond, in the sunny distance, the gentle swell of the Downs whereon this very week Japhet hath given little Japhet John—his son (and mine)—lessons in the manage of his first horse. But how and why it was that Japhet quit the Coast Brotherhood and came back to his own lordship in this dear England is story yet to tell.

And but yesterday it was that:

"Japhet," says I, "am I good wife to thee?"

"Ay, faith, and amazingly patient, all things considered, more especially this!" And he gives my hair a little pull.

"And dost love me now as when we endured so much together in the wilderness?"

Now at this he looked on me with his quirkish smile and 'stead of answering, the wretch must fall a-singing his song of Yo-ho until I kissed him into silence.

THE WORKS OF JEFFERY FARNOL

THE BROAD HIGHWAY
THE MONEY MOON
THE AMATEUR GENTLEMAN
CHRONICLES OF THE IMP
THE HONOURABLE MR. TAWNISH
BELTANE THE SMITH
THE DEFINITE OBJECT
THE GESTE OF DUKE JOCELYN
OUR ADMIRABLE BETTY
BLACK BARTLEMY'S TREASURE

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THE HIGH ADVENTURE
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GYFFORD OF WEARE
THE SHADOW
EPICS OF THE FANCY
ANOTHER DAY
OVER THE HILLS
THE JADE OF DESTINY
CHARMIAN, LADY VIBART
THE WAY BEYOND
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JOHN O' THE GREEN
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THE HAPPY HARVEST
A NEW BOOK FOR JANE
A MATTER OF BUSINESS
ADAM PENFEATHER, BUCCANEER
MURDER BY NAIL
THE KING LIVETH
THE "PIPING TIMES"
HERITAGE PERILOUS
MY LORD OF WRYBOURNE
THE FOOL BELOVED
THE NINTH EARL

Transcriber's Notes:

Both curtsey and courtsey are used in this book.

Hyphen variations left as printed.

[The end of *Winds of Fortune* by Jeffery Farnol]